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HER MAJESTY'S REBELS

MR S. R. LYSAGHT.

*Backwell Town
Near Brighton.
Limerick*

*Little Club
Peculiarly*



BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THE MARPLOT.

ONE OF THE GRENVILLES.

POEMS OF THE UNKNOWN WAY.

MACMILLAN AND CO., LTD., LONDON.



HER MAJESTY'S REBELS

BY
SIDNEY ROYSE LYSAGHT

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NOTE

It will be obvious to the reader that there are many points of resemblance between the public career of the hero of this book and that of Charles Stewart Parnell. The author hopes it may be equally clear that no attempt has been made in the character of Desmond to suggest a portrait of that great national leader. There is an historical basis for the structure of the story—not for the persons.



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CHAPTER I

THE BOUNDARY FENCE

If there had ever been trees or flower garden or pleasance round Duhallow Castle, no traces of them remained. Its walls rose direct from the grassy slopes of a little hill beside the river, and the sheep fed up to its windows. Of the original structure nothing was left except the square fortress tower and one wing; but the stones of the lost building had been used in constructing the dwelling, little better than a farmhouse, which had risen on the earlier foundations, and blocks of masonry centuries old, noble quoin stones, and pieces of moulded plinth were to be seen in the outhouses and sheds that surrounded the weed-grown courtyard. It was all of the same grey colour, and, though there was no beauty of design in the newer buildings, time and neglect had given harmony to the whole group.

The Castle stood half a mile from the village and centrally in the country to which it gave its name, midway between the Galtees and the eastern highlands of Kerry. It looked out on a great stretch of rolling pasture and moor, gay with the gold of furze bloom, and bright with the sparkle of

running waters. At intervals of a few miles wooded hollows among the bare green hills, or belts of trees fringing the lower mountain slopes, marked the positions of the greater houses; walls of loose grey limestone and broad banks divided the intervening lands; and, here and there, a whitewashed farmhouse or solitary cabin stood by the roadside. Once a great part of this country had belonged to the Desmonds: now the Castle and a few hundred acres surrounding it was all that remained to them—all at least that was held by the elder and Irish branch of the family, for some of the old property was still in the hands of the representatives of the younger branch which had long since become English.

The story of the way in which it had been acquired was perhaps not known, perhaps ignored in the English family, but it had been cherished in hatred and handed down from father to son in the Irish home. All that need be told of it now is the bare fact that, some two hundred years ago, one Henry Desmond took advantage of a penal law which enabled a younger son, on becoming a Protestant, to disinherit the elder who remained a Catholic. He committed this act of treachery, obtained possession of the property, built on the banks of the stream near the village the house known as the Court, and, being well hated in the country, afterwards placed his estate in the hands of middlemen and took up his residence in England.

The elder brother, after many adventures on the Continent as a soldier of fortune, married a French lady who brought him a considerable dowry, and with her and two children returned to his

native land. His elder son subsequently purchased the Castle of Duhallow and a small portion of the old property; and here, in their ancestral home on the edge of the estate which they had lost, his descendants continued to live,—a race of impoverished half-educated country gentlemen, full of the pride of birth and the memory of old wrongs.

Half a mile to the west of the Castle, a long belt of trees marked the division between its lands and those of Ballyvodra, the estate of the O'Briens. The boundary itself was a great earth bank drilled with rabbit-holes and overgrown with heather and furze and foxgloves—for the trees belonged to Ballyvodra—and skirted a park in which stood one of those square white country houses of the familiarly ugly south-of-Ireland pattern.

To the young people of the two families the great bank was a boundary in more than the ordinary sense, because they were forbidden on both sides to cross it. Mr. O'Brien, a Protestant landlord, regarded his Roman Catholic neighbour, who was in the habit of expressing his political opinions freely, as a rebel; Mr. Desmond looked upon him as one of the English garrison. Their children were not allowed to speak to each other, and the boundary fence had in consequence a natural attraction for both parties.

They were unequal in numbers: Ballyvodra was represented by three boys and a girl, and Duhallow usually by one small boy, who in times of war would patrol the borders of his territory accompanied by a large dog and hurl defiance at his enemies, and in times of peace might be seen across the barrier taking part in their games. His name

was Connor, and he had a brother Michael who was ten years his senior, a schoolboy when he and the others were but children—his hero from the days of his earliest recollection. Michael was something of a hero too in the eyes of the Ballyvodra children; and there were no prouder moments in Connor's early life than the occasions when he had the opportunity of marching before them along the boundary fence with his brother, gun on shoulder, at his side.

Michael was so much older than the others that the orders forbidding intercourse between the young people did not affect him—they were Connor's friends or foes, not his—but a feeling of pride kept him on his own side of the barrier. It was the other boundary of the Castle property, that which divided it from the Court and the lost estates held by the English branch of the family, that aroused his imagination and set him dreaming of a day when he might regain the old place and rebuild the family fortunes.

His father ruminated on his wrongs like the Desmonds before him, but was contented to let things take their course: it was his mother, a woman of strong character and indomitable spirit, who kindled in him the fires which had lain dormant in his race, and inspired his ambition to serve his country. She did not hesitate, in the early days, to accept the help of her only brother, a rich man with whom she was not on cordial terms, in the education of her children. He held political views which differed from her own; but her instincts as a mother overcame her scruples, and Michael, with a view to a career at the bar, went to Trinity College, Dublin, at his uncle's expense. Connor was

sent to a small school at Queenstown, and it was during his first winter holidays, when he was about fourteen years old, that a real friendship began between him and his neighbours.

The prohibition as to communication had been strictly maintained, and, on both sides, the temptation to explore the forbidden country had grown greater. Wonderland lay for them on the further side of their confines. To Kathleen O'Brien, the eldest of the Ballyvodra children, the old Castle wall, the bare hill, and the gleam of the river, with the plovers crying on the moorland beyond it, had possibilities of romance not to be found in her own spacious domains; and to Connor the shrubbery paths of Ballyvodra, the old walled garden, the busy adjoining farmyard with its barn and threshing-machine, and the great fir-wood that lay beyond the park, were full of mysterious attraction. To Kathleen and her brothers the inhabitants of the Castle had the fascination of the wicked characters in a story. They believed that secret meetings of the Fenians were held in the tower at night; and when they heard the horn old Kaylagher, the farmer, blew on winter nights to scare the foxes from his poultry-yard, they trembled in their beds in the conviction that an army of rebels was being drilled on the hills beside the river. Mr. Desmond, of whom they had heard at home that he had once shot a man in a duel, was in their eyes the personification of all wickedness; and Mrs. Desmond, the strange dark lady who hardly ever appeared beyond the Castle precincts, they believed to be a witch. To Connor the Ballyvodra people had a different charm. They represented the society outside which

his family stood. In spite of all he had heard against him from his father and Michael he could not but admire Mr. O'Brien when he saw the handsome, erect, military-looking gentleman riding along the road. The two Miss O'Briens, his maiden sisters, the peculiar bloom of whose cheeks could be seen even from a distance, were to him the very embodiment of fashion, and all that he had read of the gay society surrounding Dublin Castle was suggested in their bearing; while even Mr. O'Toole, the tutor, a humble individual, and Miss Green, Kathleen's governess, inspired him with respect as vehicles of modern culture denied to himself. On evenings when there was a dinner-party at Ballyvodra he would take up his position on his side of the boundary fence and watch the carriages drive up the avenue with intense interest. He knew Lord Shandon's big coach, and Captain Vandeleur's greys, and many of the other conveyances; and he would marvel, at sight of a side-car bearing Father Barry of Duhallow, that a good man like him should dine at the house of Mr. O'Brien and be the fellow-guest of Mr. Bolster, the Protestant rector.

The friendship between Connor Desmond and Kathleen O'Brien began in a dispute which took place between them at the boundary fence on the subject of religion and patriotism.

'All good Irishmen are Catholics,' said he.

'All good Irish *ladies and gentlemen* are Protestants,' she answered.

'Only the turncoats,' said Connor, who knew more Irish history than most boys at his age. 'The O'Briens were good Catholics and they turned over to keep the property.'

'It had nothing to do with it,' said Kathleen warmly. 'They changed because they knew it was right. You changed too when you became Christians. If 'tis wrong to change you ought to be heathen now, bowing down to wood and stone.'

It was a fair answer, and Connor sought in vain for a suitable reply. 'If you think your Mr. Bolster is a better teacher than St. Patrick you're welcome to be a Protestant,' was the best he could find, but he thought the subject over after they had parted, and appeared again next day full of arguments with which he proposed to vanquish her. Kathleen, however, had dismissed from her mind an uninteresting subject and refused to be led into any further discussion. She was in a reckless holiday mood—her governess had gone home, her father was in Cork, her aunts were confined to their room with colds in the head, and the desire to take advantage of the unusual freedom from control possessed her.

'They're all away,' she told Connor. 'It would be a fine chance for you to come and see our place.'

The proposal was fascinating, but he was silent, remembering the prohibition.

'Is it afraid you are?' she said, noting his hesitation.

Connor dismissed his scruples and climbed the fence. The unknown wonders of Ballyvodra called him on, the delight of the forbidden filled him. His head was stored with old romances, and he felt like one of his heroes entering the enemy's camp in league with the daughter of the hostile chief. For a time they avoided the immediate neighbourhood of the

house and the farmyard, which was full of work-people, and were content to explore the shrubberies and the walled kitchen-garden. The shrubbery paths were overgrown with weeds, a tree had fallen and broken down a corner of the garden wall and the gap remained unrepaired, the old flower borders were untended and old fruit-trees unpruned ; but Kathleen showed it all with pride, and Connor beheld with admiration. Through a hole in the garden wall they surveyed the back of the house and the great stableyard. It was empty, but the coach-house door was open and they could see Davy Dunn, the harness-maker, at work with thread and cobbler's wax, and Kathleen's two younger brothers, seated on stools, watching him intently. Except the great water-butt, now tipped on its shafts, and the beam scales used for weighing wool, there was little to attract attention in the yard ; but through the archway that led into the farmyard beyond they could see the horses harnessed to the revolving capstan shaft, and from the barn came the sound of voices and the pleasant hum of the threshing-machine. Outside in the haggard the sheaves were being thrown down from one of the stacks to a waggon for conveyance to the barn, and the eldest boy was watching below with terriers for the rats which remained to the last minute in the stack. Tom Condon, the shepherd, with a couple of dogs at his heels, had just come back from his flock on the hill, and was busy in the lines of dilapidated sheds tarring nets. John Nagle and his son were at work making a farm-cart, and two other men close by were cutting timber in a pit full of sweet-smelling sawdust. Connor looked at it all with regretful pleasure : the scene was so cheerful and friendly, so

different from the lonely life in his half-ruined home. He and Kathleen spent some hours together, exploring as far as the middle of the great fir-wood, and always avoiding observation, till late in the afternoon. It was nearly dark by the time they returned to the neighbourhood of the house, and then again for Connor the mystery of the place, partly lost on examination, had descended upon it. The threshing was over and most of the work-people had gone home ; but Tom Condon, with a lantern, was busy in the sheds where he penned his sheep with early lambs ; there were still men at work stabling the horses ; and the sound of the bite of the chaff-cutter, or the run of a chain halter across the wood-work of a manger, broke the silence of the empty enclosures. Though the day's work was done the night fell here with a feeling of homely shelter and friendliness which contrasted with the loneliness of the dark hours round the walls of Duhallow Castle.

Connor refused a reckless proposal of Kathleen's that he should come in to tea, but he had a look through the schoolroom-window where the boys were already busy with their meal, and peeped into the hall where a cheerful fire of logs was burning, and a great clock ticking somewhere in the shadowy distance. He was troubled by a recollection of the hostility between the two families when the time came to say good-bye.

'Why shouldn't we be friends,' he said, 'in spite of our being Catholics and you Protestants?'

'Perhaps you'll be Protestants some day,' she said encouragingly.

'Indeed we will not,' he replied, 'but we can be friends just as well. Will I see you at the fence

to-morrow? 'Twill be your turn to come and see our place.'

'Maybe I might if there's a good chance,' said she. 'But tell me—when you get home to-night, where'll you say you've been?'

'I don't expect they'll ask me,' he answered. 'I'm often away on a long walk.'

'But if they do?'

'I shall tell.'

'I suppose you must,' she assented. 'We tell lies to Mr. O'Toole and Miss Green—they don't count—but we generally tell the truth to father. And what'll happen if your father knows?'

'He may laugh or he may give me a licking, you never know. But if he does, it was worth it.'

A bond of comradeship, a secret understanding, was established between them; and as Kathleen went back hungry to her tea, and Connor crossed the dark fields towards his home, each of them knew that a real friend had been found.

It was not until a fortnight later that an opportunity came for Kathleen to pay the return visit proposed by Connor. In the dusk of a winter afternoon, when the wind was loud in the trees round Ballyvodra and swept the bare hillside of the Castle, she and Connor crossed the fields and stood among the ruined walls of the courtyard and buildings. He knew a great deal about the history of the Castle, and he was a firm believer in its legends, many of them with supernatural details, which were current among the peasantry, and had been told to him by Tom Begley, the blind fiddler. Now in the windy twilight, while the plovers were crying on the darkening moorland beyond the river, Kathleen was told of old fights beneath the Castle walls; and with a

growing feeling of timidity she heard of ghostly ancestral visitors who might be still seen riding through the courtyard on nights such as these.

'Tis a pity it's getting dark,' he said; 'I want to show you some more of the interesting places. There's the spot where they threw an informer into the river, and the coffin cut in the solid rock where a hermit was buried, and lots of jolly things; but now there's no one about you can come and see the room in the tower.'

Never before had the thought of the bright untidy schoolroom and the society of her unruly young brothers come so attractively to Kathleen as now. If it had not been for her fear of Connor's contempt she would have gone no farther, but she was determined not to let him see her timidity and followed him without a word. The great sixteenth-century tower adjoined but was not connected with the house. Connor opened a heavy door and led the way across a rude vaulted chamber, used as a tool-house, to a stone spiral staircase which was built in a recessed turret at one of the angles. The stair led to the battlements of the tower, but half-way up a door opened from it into a curious old room. It was dimly lighted by narrow windows, little more than slits in the deep masonry of the walls. The floor was in holes, and the only furniture of the room was an old bookcase, a cupboard, a deal-table, and a few chairs. Over the hearth, on which a fire of logs and turf glowed, there was a fox's head set up on a board, and a couple of guns and some fishing-tackle stood in one of the corners.

'This,' said Connor, ushering Kathleen in with some pride, 'is my room. It is really Michael's, but now he's away 'tis mine. There's one fine thing

about it, you have it all to yourself. No one ever comes up here.'

'It would be a splendid place,' Kathleen agreed, 'if there were others with you; but it must be awfully lonely all by yourself.'

'I don't notice it,' he replied. 'I read a great deal, and I generally have one of the dogs for company. Now,' he added, going to the cupboard, 'we can have some tea. You put the kettle on while I put the things out.'

The wind filled the old tower with strange sounds, and the flicker of light from the fire made ghostly shapes on the walls for Kathleen's eyes; but though she was afraid, the fascination of the adventure was greater than her fear.

'Tis three hundred years ago,' said Connor in narrative tone. 'You're the lovely daughter of a hostile chief, the enemy of our race, and we have your brother a prisoner. He's in chains down in the dungeon vaults underneath the tower. 'Twas I captured him, but you have come here alone. You have evaded the warders and come to plead for him at the risk of being captured yourself, and why? Because, though our families are enemies, you really love me.'

'I don't!' said Kathleen.

'Well, what's the use of spoiling a good story?' he said, continuing: 'In the middle of our secret interview there is a sound of a step on the stairs. Hark!'

She listened, trembling. There was indeed a sound of the opening of the great door beneath, and while they were listening a voice called out—

'Masther Connor, are ye above stairs?'

'Hush!' whispered Connor. ''Tis Thady.'

'Masther Connor!' came a louder call, but

though again there was no response, the old servant had his suspicions and began slowly mounting the stairs. Before he was half-way up Connor went out and intercepted him.

‘Bad manners to you, Thady!’ said he. ‘What’s this noise you’re making, bothering me just when I’m trying to do a bit of study.’

‘Couldn’t ye answer at onest when I called, instead of bringin’ me stiff joints up this hell of a lather?’ growled Thady. ‘Ye’re wanted in the house this minyet. The masther tould me to tell you to go sthraight in. He have a telegram from Masther Michael, and there’s good news in it, glory be to God.’

The old man hobbled away, and Connor returned to Kathleen.

‘What am I to do?’ she asked in alarm.

‘Oh, wait five minutes and I’ll be back,’ he replied. ‘You can’t go by yourself, you couldn’t find your way through all the walls and places. You go on getting the tea ready, and I’ll promise you I’ll be back in five minutes.’

The moment the outer door closed she wished she had accompanied him. Muffled tones of the wind which swept round the tower came through the thick walls: it was a wail in the window, a sound of wings on the stairway, the rumble of a distant drum in the chimney. The solitude of the place frightened Kathleen; the stories Connor had told her of hidden dungeons and of ghostly visitors came to her mind. Every minute her fear increased. She was afraid to look towards the window lest she should see the misshapen form of the banshee crouching on the sill. She fancied she heard footsteps overhead and whispers on the stairs.

After waiting for ten minutes, which seemed half an hour to her, she could bear it no longer and determined on flight, though to go needed nearly as much courage as to stay. Lighting a candle which she found on the table, she went to the door and paused before venturing on the dark staircase. Then in great trepidation she began the descent, slowly at first, but with quickening footsteps as she went, and the fancy grew upon her that she was being pursued by some unknown thing. As she opened the door her candle blew out, and she found herself in the wind and darkness with no notion as to which way to turn for home. The lights of the house were her only guide, she still felt she was being pursued, and she ran with all her speed till she came to the front entrance. A moment later she was in the open doorway of the old hall, where Mr. and Mrs. Desmond were seated by the fire and Connor standing at their side. These dreaded people alarmed her no longer, they were human and promised refuge from the terrors of the unknown outside; but she did not go forward into the room, and it was some minutes before her presence was noticed.

'We'll drink his health,' Mr. Desmond was saying as he brewed a fresh tumbler of punch. 'To come out first on the list! And at Trinity, too, a place full of Protestants and Cromwellians! B' the powers, the Desmonds'll be back in their old place yet.'

He was a huge, square-shouldered man about fifty years of age, weather-stained, blue-eyed, and noticeably handsome. His dress was that of a farmer, and though the day's work was over he had made no change beyond the substitution of a

pair of carpet slippers for his boots. He wore no collar because there were none to be obtained in the shops large enough to fit him, and he would not take the trouble to get specially measured, but his great beard so completely covered his breast that the omission was not very apparent. The lady who sat opposite to him preserved in her middle age some of the beauty for which she had been celebrated in her youth, but her appearance was in every respect a contrast to her husband's—the expression of her face as full of resolution and strength as his of easy indifference, her attire as gracefully and carefully considered as his slovenly and rude. The room in which they sat, one of the few parts of the older buildings which remained in use, was long and low, with outstanding ceiling beams, a deep fireplace set in a carved stone chimneypiece, and panelled oak walls. It contained very little furniture; but the dark woodwork and some pictures, the work of Mrs. Desmond, on the walls saved it from the appearance of nakedness.

‘He’ll be with us next week, keen for his bit of hunting,’ said Mr. Desmond, ‘and ’tis wondering I am what there is to put him on if it isn’t that half-broken yellow colt. Well, ’tis great news, and while ’tis fresh we’ll drink his health.’

He poured out some diluted punch for his wife and Connor and raised his glass. ‘Here,’ said he, ‘is to the health of Michael Desmond, God bless him!’

‘And in all his battles may he stand where he stands to-day,’ said Mrs. Desmond.

‘And may his enemies be the enemies of Ireland,’ said the master.

‘So they shall be,’ his wife added. ‘And he will not have far to seek for them.’

There was a look of pride on her face and exultation in her voice. Once she had been ambitious for herself—in her youth she had cherished hopes of becoming an artist of mark, and had afterwards been satisfied to get a few pounds for her pictures as a help in her housekeeping ; but she had not lost her ambition, she had transferred it to her son. She had given the new generation of Desmonds their brains. In Michael's success the first step towards the realisation of her dreams had been achieved, and she felt that his triumph was hers.

A few moments of silence followed the honouring of the toast, and Connor was just preparing to escape when his father caught sight in the dark doorway of a pretty little pale-faced girl, wrapped in a scarlet cloak with a hood which had fallen back from her shoulders.

'Good God !' he cried, 'here's a fairy.'

The others looked round ; Kathleen stood quite still, and Connor flushed crimson.

'Tis Kathleen O'Brien,' he said, with desperate veracity. 'I brought her over to see the place.'

A look of anger came over Mr. Desmond's face, but it was the sin of omission, not of commission, that he made Connor answer for.

'And you left your guest outside on a night like this, sir !' he said, crossing the room. 'You're welcome, my dear. Connor was for showing you the place, was he ? Well, as we've nothing left to show but hospitality, I'm sorry he forgot it.'

He took the child by the hand and led her into the room. Connor did not fear his father—he knew that his anger would pass—but he looked apprehensively at his mother's face and read his condemnation.

Not a trace of displeasure, however, appeared in her manner as she welcomed Kathleen and placed a chair for her by the fire.

'And Connor left you outside, did he? and you came in all the same,' laughed Mr. Desmond.

'I was afraid,' she replied. 'We were in the tower; we thought you'd be angry.'

'This is the first time an O'Brien has crossed our threshold for twenty years,' said Mr. Desmond, 'and you've come on a lucky day. Michael—d'ye know Michael?'

'I've often seen him riding,' replied Kathleen, 'and once or twice he spoke to me.'

'You'll stay and eat your supper with us,' said Mr. Desmond, 'twill be ready shortly.'

'I think I must go home at once. Thank you very much indeed,' replied Kathleen.

'Well, she must have something before she goes. Some hot milk. Ring the bell, Connor.'

She had expected to be received with anger, and in the overwrought state of her feelings the kindness of her welcome brought her to the verge of tears.

While the hot milk was being prepared Mr. Desmond, who was in a very good humour, and had begun to enjoy his part as the host of his hostile neighbour's daughter, continued to do most of the talking.

'The O'Briens have been in the county Cork two hundred years now,' said he. 'They came out of the county Clare, and there's no better blood in Ireland. They were great people. But indeed 'tis the same with all the old stock. Some of them with hardly the grass of a cow left. And look at meself! All the country you see from the hill

above was ours, and now, begad! 'tis dodging the bailiffs I am in the same way as a gnat in a shower of rain dodges the drops.'

He seemed to forget he was talking to a child, and his wife made no attempt to check his garrulity. She seemed amused at his remarks, and was wondering how much his success in eluding the bailiffs was due to hereditary family instinct, as in the case of the gnats, and how much to her own contrivance.

'What is a bailiff?' Kathleen asked with interest.

Mr. Desmond laughed loudly. 'May you never see one, my dear,' he answered, with an afterthought that, as things were going, Ballyvodra was by no means an unlikely place in which to make their acquaintance.

'How old are you now?' asked Mrs. Desmond.

'Thirteen,' replied Kathleen.

'Do you remember your mother?'

'Oh yes,' she answered with surprise. 'I was seven years old when my mother died.'

'You will be tall like her. You are as tall as your governess.'

'Do you find her easy to manage?' asked Mr. Desmond.

'I am sure of it, poor little woman,' observed Mrs. Desmond, 'for judging by her appearance I should say she represented the least amount of individuality which could contain a soul'—a remark which brought a short-lived smile to Connor's troubled countenance, and somewhat mystified Kathleen. She was desperately anxious to be gone. In spite of the kindness she had received she felt shy and ill at ease with Mrs. Desmond; and after taking a few sips of the hot milk brought in by Thady, who wore a black swallow-tailed coat

for the occasion over his stable breeches, she asked if she might go.

‘Thady ’ll drive you home,’ said the master.

‘If Connor came with me as far as the fence I’d be home the next minute,’ said Kathleen.

‘And if you drive they’ll know where you’ve been,’ said Mrs. Desmond, interpreting her reason for wishing to walk.

‘And would they be angry?’ asked Mr. Desmond.

‘Indeed they would,’ she replied.

His brow darkened, but he repressed the comment that was on his lips.

‘I’m sorry,’ he said; ‘but ’tis no night for you to be out walking. Hark at the storm of rain on the window! No, you’ll just drive, my dear. Connor, go tell Thady put in the grey horse.’

Connor went out on his errand in a dejected mood, well knowing that though nothing had been said of reproof in Kathleen’s presence there was trouble in store for him when she had gone; and when she drove away a few minutes later he felt that they had said good-bye for many a day, and that the comradeship which had begun to be such a pleasant thing to both of them would be henceforth forbidden by orders which could not be disobeyed.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF THE HERO

THE man who achieves fame in our time so often owes his success to some special faculty that he is a disappointing figure for portrayal, and to find in our hero those time-honoured qualities which appeal to the imagination of the people and attract women is to experience the embarrassment of riches.

The depicitors of contemporary life have avoided the old type. On the stage it is the villain who is the handsome fellow, and in fiction we are accustomed to see the chief character combating some hereditary defect of mind or body, and as likely as not a person without arms or legs. To show, therefore, in a hero a young man endowed by Nature with admirable qualifications for the part may invite incredulity or provoke resentment, and we should not have delayed in calling attention to his unprepossessing traits if evidence of them could have been found. Indeed, we may be content to wait, and belaud him ungrudgingly while we may, having no doubt that time will show the flaws, and the stress of life expose the blemishes hidden beneath the freshness of youth. Michael Desmond had enemies enough later on to see that these did not escape notice, but in his early days he not only compelled attention by his

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personality and intellectual vigour, but was admired on all sides for his charm of manner and appearance. As to his good looks the portrait which his friend Constantine Power, who afterwards became famous, painted of him in his twenty-third year still hangs in a public hall in the city of Cork to confirm the testimony of those who remember him at the time. In the pose of the head, the abundant dark locks, the clear-cut features and absence of hair on the face, the picture at a first glance has something which recalls the early portraits of Lord Byron; and though it is without the stern lines and lacks the keen watchfulness of the eyes—traits which distinguish the better-known portrait of later times—the fighting power, the look of strength, calm and confident in itself, are already apparent. He seemed born for leadership, and at school and college accepted his position as a matter of course. At Trinity he captained the small minority of Catholic students and formed them into a solid party, ready to follow his views in the debating society or to support him in a raid on a hostile political platform. He accomplished difficult tasks easily, or so it appeared; but in winning his academic honours he worked harder than was known, and was indebted to the great physical strength which he had inherited from his father for his power of reading late into the night, after a merry evening with his friends, and rising next morning fresh and unfatigued. As a student at the bar after leaving the University he became conspicuous both for his ability and his power of work, and was soon marked as a young man with a future. His career began to shape itself earlier than that of other men, and when he was only twenty-four years of age he achieved a certain public

notoriety in appearing as the hero of a piece of political effrontery—no less, indeed, than his candidature as parliamentary representative of Trinity College in opposition to Mr. Daniel, the eminent historian. He made some speeches at the time which contained the first published expression of his hatred to the English Government, and he received as many votes as he could expect ; but the fact that so young a man should have been chosen for the part of opponent, and that Desmond should have accepted it, showed the reputation he had already won and the confidence he had in himself.

It was immediately after this first public appearance that he came down for a short rest to Duhallow in the middle of the hunting season. Connor, who was now sixteen, was at home for the holidays, and had looked forward to the coming of his hero with enthusiastic anticipation. He had been without companions of his own age at Duhallow, for his intimacy with Kathleen O'Brien and her brothers had ceased. There was little comradeship between him and his parents : his father seemed to forget his presence at home, and he was quick to notice how exclusively his mother's interest centred in Michael. He was allowed to go his own way, and spent most of his time either wandering on the mountains or by the flooded river on the chance of a shot at snipe or wild-duck, or alone in the tower reading. Now and then he would walk along the boundary fence of Ballyvodra, and once Kathleen waved a distant hand to him as she crossed the lawn ; but this was the only sign he had that she was true to their friendship. Michael's coming altered everything, redirected his thoughts, gave him new ideas. No lad ever looked up to a brother with more admiration or was repaid

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with warmer affection. Michael found in him more intellectual companionship than in many men of his own age, and began even in these days to give him that entire confidence which throughout his after life was only once withheld. He spoke to an eager listener of his political aims and personal ambition. 'The history of our family wrongs is the history of Ireland's wrongs,' he said to him, 'and neither you nor I must ever forget the one or the other, Connor.' His candidature for the University had flashed him into sudden notoriety; the speeches in which he expressed his opinions with the rashness of youth had been recorded in the papers; and he came down to his own country with the knowledge that he had made himself obnoxious to the gentry and won a new popularity with the people.

Riding with Connor to the meet at Cahirmee, a couple of mornings after his arrival, he commented upon the fact that they were going among the enemy. He had declared war against them; he had little respect for them as a class; and yet he was not indifferent to their opinion. He was sensitively conscious that his family had fallen socially, and that the Desmonds of recent generations had hunted among the squires attired as farmers and unrecognised as equals. He had been punctilious in paying the subscription which he could ill afford to the hunt, and had always managed to appear in the field well mounted. Now as he rode to the meet he was pleasantly aware that there was as good a young horse under him as the neighbourhood could show, and that Connor made a presentable figure.

Half the county was out that day. Lord Shandon, the master, brought a large house-party with him; a contingent of officers, most of them mounted on

horses more at home in jumping English fences than in changing feet on Munster banks, had ridden over from the barracks at Buttevant; weather-stained pink coats and old velvet hunting-caps, once distinguishing marks of members of the Duhallow Hunt, were to be seen here and there; and as it was St. Stephen's Day, a general holiday, a crowd of farmers' sons on half-broken horses, boys on donkeys, and labourers on foot, passed along the roads leading to the covert. Mr. Hewson of Liscarrol, who had left home that morning with the bailiffs in his house, rode up looking as happy as if he had just inherited a fortune; of the five Miss de Courcys, whose ancestor had come to Ireland with Strongbow, young ladies who could groom their own horses, though they found some difficulty in the art of spelling, not one was absent; Kathleen O'Brien on a very smart grey pony was there with her brother Jack; and old Tom Freeman in his eightieth year, a sportsman who had ridden with the Duhallows since he was fifteen, had driven to the meet in his outside car and was exchanging merry greetings with every one.

'They all know each other—they're like one family, and I wish to God they were on our side instead of against us and the country,' said Michael as they drew near. 'We ought to be fighting side by side and they compel us to fight against them. And they're Irish at heart. Is there a man amongst them cares a thrawneen whether his neighbour is rich or poor? And compare this with a hunting field in England where there are sets and shades of class distinction, but a man's own breeding is of no account if he has money enough to buy well-bred horses. A man can't be called a sportsman in England unless he's rich, and then you'll hear how

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many thousand pheasants he and his friends shot in their hired preserves, or you'll see his picture in the papers as the popular owner of a Derby winner, when probably a few years before, when he was speculating on the Stock Exchange, he couldn't have distinguished a three-year-old from a brood mare.' He spoke without much knowledge of English life, but with fuller information he did not afterwards change his view.

'And they're Protestants,' he continued, referring to the Irish gentry, 'when they ought to be Catholics, and that's another barrier between them and their country. But their forefathers were compelled to change by the English Government. Those, like ourselves, who did not turn were ruined. They were not like that fellow of our family who turned traitor; they did it to hold their lands and for the sake of their families, and begad, Connor, I respect them more than those English Dissenters' sons and daughters who are turning Church of England as they get rich all over the country, not because they're compelled to it, but because they want to belong to a more respectable religion.'

If these illiterate squires, who prided themselves on their love of their country no less than Desmond, could have heard the patronising tone in which he spoke of them, they would have found it more exasperating than any of those violent things which he had said in his speeches about the English Government, and his reception among them would have been a very cold one that morning. As it was he received friendly greetings on all sides. Comradeship is ready among sportsmen; they share a common joy, and the last place where there is time for remembering political differences is at the covert

side on a winter morning when there is a good scent, and the country lies grey and still under a soft south-westerly sky.

There was one run that day of only thirty-five minutes, a straight line from Cahirmee to Ballyhoura, when the hounds were never more than a couple of fields ahead, and the hunt swept across the country like a flight of birds, each rider taking his own course and yet all in touch, the recollection of which made all those who took part in it think kindly of each other long afterwards. The day was memorable, too, for an incident in which Michael Desmond came to the front in the part of hero.

In the afternoon the hounds were running in the neighbourhood of Buttevant where the railway crosses the river and the banks are steep. The passage had been made at a ford lower down, but some of the riders, Kathleen O'Brien among them, who had been left some little distance behind had followed the road on the farther side of the river, and were parted from the rest of the field by some half-mile of sloping downland. Here Kathleen's pony became excited and bolted in a straight line for the river at a part where the cliffs were twenty feet high. As the field drew near the railway bridge she came into view, and the sight of her imminent danger had an effect like that of an unexpected shot in the midst of a troop of cavalry. There was a sudden check in the pace, a wheeling or reining in of horses, a feeling of the immediate need of action without any plan being visible. The riders on her side of the bank were too far behind to have a chance of overtaking the pony and heading her off; those on the opposite side were barred by the steep banks. The only possible way of crossing was by the railway

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bridge, but here the line was laid on open sleepers a yard apart, a possible passage for a mule, but hardly a place on which you could hope to lead a horse safely. Michael Desmond in a moment took in the whole situation. He saw that the pony was completely out of hand, and that the child was doomed unless she could be intercepted. Her distance from the cliffs towards which her pony was galloping was about a third of a mile ; his own distance from this point being about the same in a direction nearly at right angles. The attempt was worth making, and he did not hesitate. There were some exclamations of surprise, and then dead silence and quickened pulses among the lookers on as he put spurs to his horse and jumped the fence on to the railway line. Then, without dismounting, and leaving the pace to his good horse, he rode across the perilous timbers and reached the opposite bank. It now became a race. Kathleen was about four hundred yards from the cliffs, Desmond some forty yards farther, and both of them on level ground. No man riding to a winning-post or flying before an enemy ever got more out of his horse than Desmond did now. He gained rapidly on the pony, and every yard he won was counted by the eager eyes that watched him from the other bank. As they grew closer there were involuntary exclamations and pale faces in the group of motionless horsemen. Connor, who was among them, could bear it no longer and turned away his head ; an old shepherd in the fields was on his knees with hands extended to heaven. The pony held on, and though Desmond, whose horse was doing a superb pace, continued to gain, he saw in the last fifty yards that he could not reach the cliffs in time to deflect Kathleen's course. Having

perceived this he rode his horse with a final burst of speed straight at the pony's head and struck him on the shoulder with a force that hurled him into a shattered heap and threw Kathleen violently to the ground. He himself kept his seat for a moment till his horse also stumbled and fell. Helpers enough came on the scene without delay, and Kathleen was extricated from the ruins of her pony. She was quite unconscious, but before the doctor, who was on the field, had arrived she recovered. Then kind faces, lightened with smiles of intense relief, looked down on her, and Desmond, who had been standing at her side pale and anxious, stooped and kissed her.

The news of his exploit reached his home before Michael arrived himself that evening, and exaggerated accounts of it were spread abroad in the district.

It was told in a public-house in Buttevant, on the authority of the shepherd who was an eye-witness, that the Dublin express was approaching at the time at full speed : 'Sixty miles an hour, divil a less,' said the narrator, 'and Misther Desmond lept the rails in front of the ingin, almost undher the wheels themselves'; and when one of the company observed that the express did not pass until six o'clock his remark was received with disapproval, and a man who had been in another parish all day promptly snubbed him. 'Would ye doubt the word of Andy Kearney, ye blackguard?' he cried. 'Sure I seen the thrain meself, and if 'twasn't the express 'twas a spicial, and 'twasn't sixty but seventy miles 'twas going, making up time.'

Desmond's horse was a good deal cut and bruised, but not seriously injured. After Kathleen had been placed in a carriage he went to a neighbouring farmhouse and borrowed a mount for the homeward



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journey. The strain on him had been great, and the reaction made him gay and ready to talk as he rode home with Connor. Of the two it was the lad who seemed shaken and preoccupied.

‘You shall have your little friend back now, Connor, my boy,’ he said. ‘You’ll find old O’Brien will be over to call in the morning and make friends. She’s a dear, and so pretty!’ he added involuntarily. ‘One of us might ride over to-night to inquire how she’s getting on. She’ll be sorry when she hears her pony had to be shot.’

‘Nobody would have done it but you,’ said Connor, with almost religious admiration of his brother’s courage.

‘Oh, I don’t know. I was handy to the spot, but I like them to see a Desmond in the front when something wants doing. We have to try and restore the old name of the family, Connor, whenever there’s a chance.’ And Connor fervently believed that his brother would do so, but had doubts about himself.

Whatever question there might be about the standing of the Desmonds among the gentry of the neighbourhood, there was none as to the respect in which the old family was held by the people. Mr. Desmond had not lost it, though he appeared among them dressed as a farmer and was ready to gossip with the first comer. Michael, who added a certain dignity of bearing to his friendliness of manner, and whose appearance was noticeably distinguished, they looked up to as a fit representative of a great name. As he rode that evening through the little street of Buttevant he was greeted on all sides with a deference which he remarked with satisfaction. His future career had begun to shape itself in his mind. These were the people he was going to lead, and he already

felt conscious of his power of leading and of the joy of leadership. Here were his forces. The men he had been hunting with all day, good fellows and pleasant company, were on the other side. They were enemies. There must be no compromise. As they rode over the hill beyond the town a great stretch of country came into view. The long folds of the low grey cloudland above it were touched with the glow of sunset, and far away in the west there were openings of clear sky. The little river caught the light here and there and flashed from shadowy windings into luminous pools, and a sudden brightness struck the limestone walls of the uplands and made the grey tower of the Castle a landmark in the darkening valley.

Michael paused for a moment to look at the scene—the old country of the Desmonds; but it was not on the Castle that his eye rested, but on the woods half a mile to the eastward, where the gables of the Court were just visible through the bare trees.

‘That’s the place I want,’ he said; ‘it has a fascination for me. It was taken from us and it must be taken back. When I think of it I feel ashamed of wasting a day of my life that might be spent in bringing the time nearer. And look at the owner, as he calls himself, our English cousin! Was there ever a finer specimen of the absentee? Neither he nor his father before him was ever here for a month.’

‘I suppose he’d sell cheap,’ said Connor.

‘I wouldn’t ask him to sell.’

‘But of course,’ Connor added, ‘it would be much jollier to take it.’

Michael laughed. ‘He shall have no choice, Connor; we’ll compel him to sell, him and every

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other absentee in the country, if we play our game properly. That will be the next best thing to taking it.'

He became thoughtful, dreaming about the future of Ireland and his own hopes and ambitions. At another time the subject he had opened would have been intensely interesting to Connor, but now he too remained silent. He had his own dreams, but they led him no farther than the darkening valley where the west was a glow of crimson behind the fir-woods of Ballyvodra.

CHAPTER III

BREAKFAST AND DINNER AT BALLYVODRA

IN the household of Ballyvodra there was no government, no order, no rules that were not habitually broken. The master would allow things to take their course until some abuse became unbearable, and then express his feelings in a burst of anger. Carmody the butler and Mrs. Irwin the cook, both old servants and loyal to the family, were continually quarrelling together; Mr. O'Toole, the tutor, was secretly in awe of the boys, and Miss Green, Kathleen's governess, shed many a tear over her pupil's wilfulness. Mr. O'Brien's maiden sisters, Miss Bridget and Miss Honora, superintended the housekeeping on alternate weeks, and each lacked the authority of a permanent mistress.

Both within and without the place was amazingly untidy and neglected, partly from bad management and partly from want of money. In some of the fine old rooms the paper hung in strips from the walls, the carpets were in holes, hardly a window was in working order, and many of them were kept open by the insertion of a boot-jack or a log of firewood. Outside it was much the same: the once orderly garden was a wilderness of overgrowth and weeds, the front avenue was used by

farm-carts, and the entrance gates were off their hinges.

The master of the place had undergone a similar change. Once, as all the neighbourhood knew, when the old mistress was alive, Ballyvodra had been among the most hospitable houses of the county, and Mr. O'Brien the gayest of hosts. After his wife's death things had begun to drift, and as money troubles accumulated, and some of the less generous influences of religion took hold of him, he allowed indifference to appearances to degenerate into neglect. Like most Irish squires he had received but an indifferent education, and at school had shown no power of acquiring such knowledge as was within his reach. Indeed, according to the account of his school-fellow and cousin, Dr. O'Brien of Dublin, the only thing he had ever really learnt was a piece of poetry beginning—

In yonder glass I see a drowning fly,
Its little wings how vainly doth it ply.

But though he had certainly little book-learning he was a man of bright intelligence, and on some particular questions, such as the treatment of horses, an authority in his county. At sixty he was still a handsome man, with eyes so blue and a smile so kind that every child loved him at once ; still a man of distinguished bearing in spite of the shabby clothes he usually wore ; and when he was not weighed down by money troubles or oppressed with the recollection of the sins of mankind in general and of his neighbours in particular, his inborn geniality and even, at times, his old high spirits would reappear. His friends attributed the change which had come over him to his religious principles, though

they were, perhaps, less the cause than an expression of that change. His nature was emotional, and in his sorrow for the loss of his wife he had felt the need of spiritual comfort, and had not found it in his weekly visits to Duhallow church, which were more memorable for the gossips in the churchyard before service, and the lunches with one or other of his neighbours afterwards, than for anything Mr. Bolster said in his sermons. As time went on he grew more dissatisfied, and at last, under the influence of an old friend, a certain General Baggs, who, after having taken more than his share of this world's pleasures was entering a claim for those of the next, he left the church which had neglected his soul and joined the little sect of Plymouth Brethren. His defection caused much regret to his friends and filled his sisters with consternation. He had hoped that they might be induced to follow his example, but they had shown such unusual decision in their refusal on the first occasion when he had made the suggestion that he did not repeat it. In his visits to the little meeting-house in Mallow he had to be content with the company of Mr. O'Toole, occasionally followed by Miss Green, who secretly loved the tutor, for the children after one or two trials had shown their boredom in such unseemly behaviour that they were afterwards allowed to go to church as before with their aunts. The children were too young to be much affected by the change which had gradually come over the Ballyvodra household, but Miss Edget and Miss Honora felt it acutely. They had not yet abandoned the hope of marrying, though they had come to the conclusion when possible husbands presented themselves that their imagination had taken the shape of widow.

Ballyvodra, without society, they felt they were not having a fair chance. Their jointures were neither large nor very regularly paid by their brother, and they had no choice but to make their home with him, though once a year they took a holiday at some English or Irish watering-place, and were reported in a recent summer to have been seen paddling at Tramore. They made some feeble attempts to keep their brother up to the mark in the performance of his social duties, but without success, and on one occasion when they had ventured to suggest that he should call on the newly-arrived regiment at Buttevant their proposal was angrily received. 'What'd I want to be calling on them for?' said he; 'and is it thinking of finding husbands you are among a pack of boys—at your age when you ought to be preparing your souls for Eternity?' They had wept together in their room over these hard words of their brother, and as soon as his irritation had passed he himself felt that he had been harsh, and tried to make amends afterwards by an extra kindness of manner and a payment on account of overdue income.

On the day of Kathleen's accident the ladies had decided that it would be their duty to remind their brother of the propriety of calling at the Castle and expressing his thanks to Michael Desmond, and next morning at breakfast they were considering how best to approach the subject which he would deal with himself.

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O'Toole, could you keep the boys quiet a moment ; we can't hear our own voices.'

'I shall never be able to repay him,' said Mr. O'Brien. 'He's a fine young fellow, and 'tis a thousand pities he's a rebel like the rest of his family.'

'And a Roman,' added Mr. O'Toole, in whose eyes that was the greater sin of the two.

'Yes, yes,' said Mr. O'Brien impatiently. 'Dan, sir,' he cried, as he noticed a puppy's nose on the edge of the tablecloth, 'how often did I tell you not to be bringing your dogs here ! Turn him out !' and without waiting to see whether his order was obeyed, and oblivious of the babel of voices round the table, he propped up a tract against a salt-cellar, according to his daily custom, and commenced reading while he continued his breakfast.

'Ah !' said Mr. O'Toole, observing the work in question, 'that's a very satisfying little pamphlet. I read it meself.'

'What is it named ?' asked Miss Green.

'Tis great reading,' said Mr. O'Brien, 'tis called "Crumbs of Comfort for Chickens of Grace."'

'*Children* of Grace, I think,' corrected the tutor.

'Ah yes, well, so it is,' he admitted, after taking a glance at the title. 'Baggs recommended it to me. By the bye, I did not ask you about the meeting yesterday afternoon. 'Twas as well I did not go, as it happened, or I wouldn't have been home when they brought Kathleen back. And you were there too, Miss Green ? Tell me now who conducted the meeting.'

'Colonel Daunt offered the first prayer,' she replied, speaking very slowly and with a fine brogue,

‘and afterwards Mr. Menus was very beautiful on Psalms seven, thirteen.’

‘And Ho-sea two, eleven,’ added the tutor solemnly.

‘Was he now! Well, I’d like to have been there, but ’twas for the best,’ said Mr. O’Brien. ‘Dan, run upstairs like good boy and find out if Kathleen is asleep still. Go quickly now!’ and for the second time he settled himself to the study of his pamphlet.

Meanwhile Jack, at the request of his aunt Honora, was for the tenth time giving details of the accident, and during the narrative found himself contradicted on almost every point by his brothers. They had not been present, but that did not matter; they had heard reports in the stables which they preferred.

‘Shut up, will you, Jem, or I’ll beat the life out of you after breakfast,’ cried Jack, furious at a fresh interruption; ‘if ’tis Hickey you’re going by he wasn’t within five miles of the place himself.’

‘Shut up yourself,’ said Jem. ‘I don’t believe you were there either.’

‘Ah, boys, be quiet!’ remonstrated Miss Bridget, ‘or I’ll complain of you to your papa. Go on, Jack, and tell me who was it carried her out to Mr. Freeman’s carriage.’

‘’Twas Dr. Reeves and Lord Shandon, and——’

‘They did not,’ said Jem, ‘she got up and walked and they no more than holding her by the arms. I had it from herself.’

On this point a fresh dispute followed, and the sound of voices, including that of Dan’s pup, which had been secretly retained under the table, grew so loud that Mr. O’Brien was aroused from his studies

and brought his fist down upon the table so violently that he set the china rattling.

'Silence there!' he cried. 'You mannerless young cubs! Faith, Mr. O'Toole, your pupils are a credit to you. I'd go into one of the cabins at the Cross and find better behaviour than at my own table. One word more from any of you and, believe you me, 'tis with a stick you'll get your answer.'

The boys knew by experience that on the rare occasions when their father threatened punishment he did not fail to carry it out, and dead silence followed.

'And now one of you get the Bibles,' he continued. 'We're getting later with prayers every morning. Bridget, you were behind with breakfast again to-day. The whole house is neglected and everything three-and-a-haly.'

'You were outside giving orders to Robert Owen, William. We were waiting for you to begin breakfast,' replied his sister meekly.

'Ah, what nonsense, woman! Waiting for me indeed!' cried Mr. O'Brien. ''Twasn't ready, and that's the truth of it. Fine managers ye are. Fine wives ye'd make to poor men.'

They were accustomed to these occasional unreasonable outbursts and remained discreetly silent, while Mr. O'Toole bestowed a glance on Miss Green as though to say, 'See what an example of unrestrained temper for a Christian gentleman to set his children.'

Meanwhile a Bible had been placed in front of each member of the family, and the boys were busy in finding their places when Dan returned to the room.

'Well, is she awake?' his father asked him.

'She is, sir,' replied Dan ; 'and what's more, she wants some breakfast, and she said she'd be glad if you'd go up yourself.'

'Did she now ?' he exclaimed. 'I'll be with her in a minute. We'll omit the chapter this morning, but while we're together we must not forget to thank God for the mercy He has shown us.'

Usually he read from a book of family prayers, but this morning, in a few simple words of his own which breathed the genuineness of his faith and a Christian charity not very noticeable in the sect to which he belonged, he gave thanks for the Divine protection of his own house and asked the Divine blessing on his neighbour's.

The afternoon call passed off pleasantly enough in spite of some coldness of manner on the part of Mrs. Desmond. The Miss O'Briens, who hardly knew her by sight, were somewhat taken aback when they met in this recluse a self-possessed woman of the world, gracefully attired and still beautiful. They had entered the house determined that their manner should show no suspicion of condescension though their visit might be regarded as gracious : they had left with the feeling of having received rather than granted a favour. Between Mr. Desmond and his neighbour the greeting had been cordial, and they were very soon outside on the hill discussing the points of some young horses. Michael was out shooting with Connor, but Mr. O'Brien intimated his intention of calling again to express his thanks and gratitude to him personally.

An invitation to dinner which included the whole household followed the visit, and was accepted by Michael for himself and Connor, not altogether with his mother's approval. She was jealous of any

growth of friendship between him and the neighbouring families, lest the hatred for their political principles which he had inherited and she had fostered should be weakened. But she understood him too well to raise objections, nor had she any real grounds for apprehension: his political faith was secure, and already pointed his path to so clear a goal that it was in no danger of being disturbed by casual sympathies. The only guests at first invited to meet them were Captain and Mrs. Boyle, near neighbours, and among the very few friends of the family who still remained constant visitors at Ballyvodra; but Lord Shandon, when calling to inquire for Kathleen, had expressed such a strong desire to become acquainted with young Desmond, that Mr. O'Brien on the spur of the moment had invited him and Lady Shandon to join the party.

An occasion so unusual and important created a stir in the Ballyvodra household. Mrs. Irwin was on her metal to produce a dinner that should do credit to the family. Carmody arranged the old silver on the sideboard and polished the dining-room table with a proud heart. Miss Bridget and Miss Honora had anxious consultations about their toilet. Lady Shandon and Mrs. Boyle would be sure to wear 'low necks,' and they themselves had evening dresses with square openings which they had bought and worn when away on their last holiday, but had not ventured to appear in before their brother. They protested the suitability of these to each other, but, even while doing so, saw their brother's eye upon them and decided to introduce a grille of lace over the questionable squares. To Kathleen it was a momentous occasion. She had quite recovered from her shaking, and was to be allowed the privilege of

coming in to dinner as one of the party, while Jack was not to be admitted until dessert. She was longing to see her friend Connor, but it was the prospect of meeting Michael, who had saved her life, that excited her. She had always admired him, but now he was a hero—her hero, one who by the service he had done her had given her the privilege of admiration denied to others.

About half an hour before the time when the guests were expected she entered the drawing-room in a new white frock, and took a critical glance round. She was the only person in the house with a sense of order, and, young as she was, she had already begun to exercise some influence on the household arrangements. She compelled her younger brothers to obey her when they took no notice of higher authority, and her father would listen to her on such matters as the glazing of a broken window or the occasional weeding of the flower garden when his sisters' entreaties were disregarded. She saw now that the room was at all events not untidy. It was large and had a sort of faded beauty, the furniture being of good design, and the carpet and curtains almost colourless with age. Kathleen was contemplating a large hole in the carpet when Jack strolled in.

'Hullo!' said he, 'how grand we are with our fine blue sashes!'

'Just pull that rug over that hole, Jack, like a good boy,' she said, disregarding his personalities.

'Sure, 'tis over one already,' said Jack, 'and there's a rat-hole there.'

'Well, we must just draw the end of the sofa over it,' said she. 'That's better. Now put another log on the fire. I don't want to dirty my hands.'

Jack threw a log rather carelessly on the fire with disastrous results. The fireplace was as rickety as everything else in the house, and the weight of the log brought the front bars and the whole fire with it on to the hearth.

Kathleen gave a cry of despair, and Jack contemplated the wreckage with a whimsical air.

'We're destroyed!' he exclaimed. 'They'll be here in a minute. The honour of the family's destroyed in the county!'

Kathleen flew to the kitchen for assistance, and when Miss Bridget and Miss Honora arrived on the scene a few minutes later, ready to receive their guests, they found a room full of smoke, Carmody without his coat and half the servants of the establishment apparently fighting with each other on the hearth. Miss Bridget said afterwards that but for an effort of will and her feelings of duty she would have fainted on the spot, but she was thankful, more than thankful, that they managed to get things patched up before their guests arrived, and even before the master came down. How it was done no one knew, but the grate was fairly presentable and the room somewhat cleared of smoke by the opening of windows before the first carriage drove up to the house.

Carmody announced Captain and Mrs. Boyle, and a middle-aged, rather stout, military-looking man wearing an eyeglass entered the room accompanied by a lady of amiable countenance with a humorous twinkle in her eyes. Captain Boyle had not married a lady of his own class; his wife, daughter of an apothecary in Clonmel, had won his affection when he had been quartered in that town as a subaltern; but though, as his bride, she had received a qualified

welcome in the county, her amiability and powers of amusing had gradually made her popular. Now, while her husband, who spoke in loud hearty tones, was making his greetings in all directions, she had a half-whispered communication for each of the party which made them all laugh in turn.

‘And now,’ she said, speaking to Kathleen and turning to her host, ‘doesn’t papa look young in evening dress?’

Mr. O’Brien’s acknowledgment of the compliment was interrupted by the arrival of Michael Desmond ; and Connor, who in his passage across the hall had been subjected to a sharp fusilade of pea-shooters from behind the stairs, followed him into the room rather shyly. Mr. O’Brien met Michael at the door and welcomed him warmly.

‘I won’t speak of gratitude,’ he said, ‘until I have the chance of seeing you alone. Let me introduce you to my sisters.’

Connor and Kathleen shook hands with unnatural formality, and while Michael was still engaged in the exchange of courtesies Carmody again appeared, and in a portentous voice announced, ‘His Lordship and her honour’s Ladyship.’ A rather homely and very happy-looking couple entered, and Lady Shandon almost immediately took possession of Kathleen, leaving Connor to his own reflections. Unlike his little friend, whose eyes were bright and who seemed in high spirits, he felt rather uncomfortable among these grown-up people, and was meditating on his folly in coming when he was presented to Miss Green, with permission to take her in to dinner. Mr. O’Brien led the way with Lady Shandon, and was followed by Mr. O’Toole with Mrs. Spencer Boyle. To celebrate the event which had originated

the party, Kathleen, to her great delight, was entrusted to Michael Desmond, Captain Boyle and Lord Shandon bringing up the rear with the ladies of the house.

Michael's manner was so full of comradeship that any little shyness Kathleen had felt at first disappeared directly he had spoken to her.

'I got your letter all right,' he said, 'but wasn't it rather stiff?'

'Oh,' she hastened to explain, 'it wasn't a bit the sort of letter I wanted to write. Miss Green told me what to put, and Aunt Honora altered it, and papa had to see it. It didn't really thank you properly at all. I wanted to send you my love, but Miss Green said it would not be becoming.'

'Oh, did she?' laughed Michael. 'Well, perhaps it would not have been quite proper for Miss Green to send her love to me, but I think it would have been very nice for you to do it. And you're none the worse for your shaking?'

'Not a bit, but I'm afraid papa won't let me go out hunting again this winter; besides, I've lost my poor pony. Do look,' she added, as they were crossing the hall, 'at Jack hiding there on the stairs. I'm glad he can see us, as he prophesied that I'd have to go in with Mr. O'Toole.'

'I think it is quite right for us to go in together,' said Michael, as they took their seats. 'If it had not been for you and me there would have been no party.'

'And if it hadn't been for you there would have been no *me*,' she replied. 'Do look at poor Connor's face.'

Indeed it was a harassed countenance that she called attention to, for Miss Green had just opened a conversation with Connor by asking him if he did not consider Shelley's 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' a star in English literature. Meanwhile Mr. O'Brien, who had said grace with a pre-occupied air, was busy ladling out giblet soup from a large tureen in front of him, while Miss Bridget kept an anxious eye on the rather unsteady-handed maid who was assisting Carmody to take round the plates.

At the door a youth wearing a tail-coat of the butler's, which was too large for him, stood in nervous readiness to give the signal to another servant stationed at the end of the hall and assist in the transfer of viands from the base to the front; and, hidden at various points of vantage on the line of communication with the kitchen, the boys watched the proceedings with deep interest.

The table, lighted with candles, was a centre of brightness in the dark room. It had no decoration beyond the silver candlesticks, for at Ballyvodra the carving was done in the old-fashioned style on the board, and all the space was needed for the dishes. Even the wine-glasses were an unusual addition to the familiar punch tumblers, but to-night some bottles of a claret, long undisturbed in the cellar and forgotten by its master, had been brought up by Carmody. As the table began to fill up with dishes Mrs. Boyle, always unreserved in comment, congratulated Mr O'Brien on his retention of the old customs.

'Spencer likes it *a la Russe*,' she said, 'but indeed that's just because 'twas the custom in his

regiment. I tell him the dinner-table was made for the dinner. Now, don't y'agree with me, Lady Shandon?'

'But so few men can carve now,' said Lady Shandon.

'They can do nothing as well as they could when I was a girl,' said Mrs. Boyle. 'Look at the slow, lazy way the young men dance. Ah, Mr. O'Brien, d'ye remember the fun we used to have at the old hunt balls, and I wouldn't ask for a better partner than yourself. You're not doing your duty at all in shutting yourself up at home. You ought to be taking the girls out and giving them a chance of getting husbands.' }

Mr. O'Brien exchanged smiles with Mrs. Boyle at her matrimonial allusion to his sisters, who were still known as 'the girls' among old friends.

'But indeed, Mrs. Boyle,' he replied, 'you must not forget, because you keep so young yourself, that some of us are getting old.'

'Well, in a year or two Kathleen will be coming out,' said Lady Shandon, 'and then we shall expect to see more of you.'

'Coming out!' he repeated. 'Why, she's a child. I hope it will be many a year before she begins to think of gadding about the country and keeping her poor aunts out of their beds at night. There's school before her first. I'm going to send her to England in the spring.'

'To England! I'm so glad to hear that. It will be an excellent thing for her,' said Lady Shandon.

'And she'll come back with a beautiful Englified accent,' exclaimed Mrs. Boyle. 'Living all the time in Ireland one can't escape a little touch of

the brogue, I suppose. Now, have I any of the brogue, Mr. O'Brien ?'

'Not a bit in the world,' replied Mr. O'Brien, his natural gallantry overcoming his truthfulness.

'You're quite right, Mr. O'Brien, 'tis *Manchester*,' she assented complacently. 'My father had some relations there, and I used to stay with them there when I was a child.'

'But why,' asked Desmond, joining in the conversation, 'should we want to copy the English accent? It seems to me a thing to avoid. It's either slipshod or affected. And in a good many other things, too, we might spend our time better than in trying to imitate them.'

'You must remember,' said Mr. O'Toole sententiously, 'that we are speaking the English language, and that the brogue, which is our contribution to it, can hardly be an expression of our patriotism. From your point of view we ought to speak Irish.'

'Indeed, that same brogue, sir, is the only national trait I can find in a good many of my countrymen these times,' replied Desmond, avoiding the question in a retort; but the conversation had spread down the table, and Lord Shandon was glad to turn from the exchange of local gossip with Miss Bridget and Captain Boyle to a subject that interested him.

'I don't agree with Mr. O'Toole,' said he, 'that, as Irishmen, Irish is our national tongue. You might as well say that Anglo-Saxon was the national tongue of England. English, which is the fusion of a dozen languages, has spread westward to Ireland, and farther west to America; but it has taken national root. At the same

time, though we do not speak the old Irish language, it is our duty to preserve it.'

'I'll bet there's not a person in this room knows a dozen words of Irish,' said Captain Boyle. 'I know one sentence—"Thrum pogue colleen ogue."¹ I used to find it rather useful.'

'Spincer!' said his wife reprovingly.

'Oh, what does it mean, Captain Boyle?' asked Miss Green.

'I don't think you ought to know, Miss Green.'

'Mr. O'Toole, please tell me.'

'Ask him when you are alone together,' said Kathleen wickedly; and Miss Green, being the only person in the room except Lady Shandon who was unable to translate the sentence, could neither understand why every one laughed nor why Mr. O'Toole looked so confused.

'But you'll lose your bet, Captain Boyle,' said Kathleen. 'Connor knows heaps of Irish. He can write it.'

'Oh, can he?' said Lord Shandon, looking at Connor, who was thus brought into sudden notice out of the obscurity in which he had been dining. 'That's capital. I'm going through a course of lessons myself. Where did you get yours, my boy?'

'I did some grammar with Father Barry, sir,' replied Connor, 'but I picked up most of it from Tom Begley.'

'The blind fiddler! I've heard of him. An Irish scholar, eh? I must make his acquaintance.'

'You must know the fellow,' said Mr. O'Brien. 'Why, there's not a fair in the county without him, and whenever you see a crowd of idlers in the

¹ Tabhair dom póg=give me a kiss.

village street he's the centre of them; and if he starts his fiddling in the yard the work stops, and men and girls and gossoons are all round him in a minute.'

'A local Arion,' remarked his Lordship.

'Now, Shandon, don't be puzzling us,' said Captain Boyle. 'I'll bet no one in the room knows who that chap was.'

'It sounds like a star,' Miss Honora ventured.

'That is Orion, I think,' said Miss Green, who had a certificate in astronomy.

'Yes, yes, O'Ryan,' observed Mrs. Boyle, reflecting. 'The family came originally from the county Clare. Now, Kathleen, what's that you're laughing at again? I never saw such a girl. Keep her in order, Mr. Desmond.'

'Now's your chance of showing your classical knowledge, Connor,' said Kathleen mischievously. But though Connor remembered his Ovid he held his tongue and pointedly ignored her invitation.

At the same time Miss Green gave Mr. O'Toole a glance which he understood to express her confidence in his knowledge of Lord Shandon's allusion and her expectation that he would explain it. He therefore speedily turned the subject back to Tom Begley, who, he said, was not the sort of man to encourage.

'Tom Begley is a poet of considerable powers as well as a good fiddler,' said Michael. 'Give him a subject and in five minutes he'll have it in verse for you. Now, I think that a man who does so much to add to the gaiety of the people whose lives are not over happy is worth encouraging. And he finds it hard enough to earn a living, and, like other artists, he complains of the

scanty rewards of the Muses. How was it he put it?

The noblest po-uts of the world were poor,
Like Homer and meself and Thomas Moore ;
Euripides, that grand Athaynian bard,
Lived upon dilisk when the times was hard ;
And Socrates, while tyrants walked in silk,
Ate his pitaties without buttermilk.'

'That's very good,' said Mrs. Boyle, 'and I never knew they had dilisk in those days.'

'They hadn't,' Mr. O'Toole assured her. 'Begley is of course an uneducated man.'

'Perhaps,' said Lord Shandon, 'he wished to indicate some vegetable like pickled cabbage. The mother of Euripides was, I believe, a greengrocer.'

'Oh, Tom's a wag,' said Michael, 'but he's by no means uneducated. He knows more than any of us about some things. His memory is stored with the beautiful old songs and legends which, like so many of our other national inheritances, we are allowing to perish.'

'Real good yarns, eh?' said Captain Boyle, who resented any serious note in conversation.

'The very best,' said Michael complacently, 'as different from the second-class English novels we read instead of them as this claret is from raspberry vinegar.'

'There is no doubt,' said Lord Shandon, 'that there is a treasury of beauty in our old literature, and I agree with you that we don't study it as much as we ought.'

'And it's the same in other things,' Michael continued. 'We forget our old music, but we know the vulgar airs out of the English comic operas. Instead of using our national inheritance we try to imitate our neighbours.'

He said *we* with the suggestion that he meant *you*, and his tone escaped neither Lord Shandon nor Captain Boyle. To the former the self-confidence of the young man caused no annoyance. His favourite duty was the exercise of his influence in the endeavour to reconcile differences in Ireland, and he was interested in Desmond as a young politician of promise. Captain Boyle, however, chafed at his air of superiority, and contemplated taking him down a peg.

'Imitation, is it!' said he. 'Perhaps you'll tell us some of the things we imitate.'

'Well,' said Michael, 'we begin with a poor imitation of royalty at Dublin Castle, and end with

'Ah, now, don't be saying anything against the Castle, Mr. Desmond,' broke in Miss Honora. 'Some of our pleasantest recollections are of the balls there before we became such stay-at-homes.'

It was rather a daring speech for her in her brother's presence, and if they had been alone he would probably have lectured her on the vanity of worldly pleasures, but he merely smiled. He was in a genial mood, the unfamiliar glow of good wine was in his veins and stirred memories in his mind of pleasant festival occasions long ago.

'Desmond,' he said, 'a glass of wine with you! We must not forget that this happy gathering is really of your making.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Michael, raising his glass. 'No man could have a greater reward for a very simple service.'

Others followed Mr. O'Brien's example. Lord Shandon drank to Kathleen, and expressed his congratulations on her escape in a few complimentary

words, and Captain Boyle pledged his hostesses in turn. The talk became very genial, the little cloud of political controversy, which had threatened the harmony for a few moments, disappeared, and every one, except perhaps Connor, was happy. He was discontented without quite knowing why, and gladly took the opportunity of withdrawing from the table with the ladies. He felt a little out of place among the grown people, and resented Kathleen's ease and the obvious pleasure which she took in her surroundings. It seemed to him that though he was her friend she looked over his head and put on airs; and, being in love, he took offence easily. Of Michael, of course, he could not feel jealous, but it was clear to him that she looked up to her preserver with intense admiration, and that by his brother's side he himself was a very unimportant person.

After the departure of the ladies hot water and lemons were brought in, and, before long, steaming tumblers stood in front of Mr. O'Brien, Captain Boyle, and Desmond. Lord Shandon, an appreciator of good vintages, asked his host's permission to retain his wine-glass, and Mr. O'Toole diluted a little of the '74 La Rose with cold water.

The bouquet of a fine claret is for the drinker only; the aroma of whisky punch is wafted generously abroad, and enfolds the table in an atmosphere of conviviality. So also with the recipients. The wits of the claret-drinker warm with a gentle self-contained glow, while those of his neighbour of the punch-bowl seek outlets of expression and ask for comradeship.

Lord Shandon's mood was reflective. He began a serious conversation with Desmond, and escaped interruption for a few minutes while Captain

Boyle was occupied in telling an anecdote to the others.

‘We both of us have the future of our country very much at heart,’ he said, paying the young man the compliment of discussing on equal terms a subject he had spent years in studying. ‘I read your speeches at the University election with great interest, and, though we apparently belong to different parties, we have a common object. You are beginning your career. I am—well, not yet finishing mine, I hope—but after a good many years’ study I am still perplexed. Now, are we not all on the wrong tack? Ought we not to be pulling together? Cannot we find common interests that are stronger than our differences? In a word, is there a chance of forming an Irish party independent of class or religion—a party whose sole object is the prosperity of Ireland?’

To Desmond the questions suggested nothing but ineffectual optimism. He had the instinct of leadership, which recognises great natural forces, and looks impatiently at compromise.

‘I believe, sir,’ he replied, ‘that there is not the slightest hope of it.’

‘But why?’

‘Well, sir, who wants it? One perhaps in a thousand, like yourself. But in Ireland the classes are on one side and the people on the other. The interest of the landlord is not that of the tenant, and the master’s faith is not that of his servant.’

‘Of course, of course,’ said Lord Shandon; ‘that makes the problem difficult, but it ought to be overcome. There must be mutual concession.’

‘Concession can never inspire a great cause,’ said Desmond, warming. ‘If your class is to lead the

people it must not be by concessions to them, but by fighting *for* them. You cannot do it; you would be fighting against yourselves. In Ireland the people must find leaders from their own ranks, unless a man of position and influence such as yours sacrifices his own interests and espouses their cause. To begin with, he would have to adopt Home Rule!

Captain Boyle had finished his anecdote and turned to listen to the conversation.

‘But is it not begging the question to assume that Home Rule would be to the interest of Ireland and the people?’ Lord Shandon remarked, without any irritation, though he was not accustomed to have his favourite views tossed aside with so little ceremony. ‘Would Home Rule help to make the people more prosperous? If I could see that it would I should not hesitate to adopt it.’

‘The people believe in it, sir, and any man who wishes to lead them must believe in it too,’ replied Desmond.

‘Hark!’ interjected Captain Boyle derisively. ‘Hark at this Mr. Desmond advising Shandon to become a Home Ruler.’

‘We’re a rebel nation, sir, a nation of rebels,’ said Mr. O’Brien, starting off suddenly on one of his tirades. ‘If I were a young man I’d be away out of the place to New Zealand to-morrow. And ’tis our own fault, half of it. We’re full of dirty pride. We must be fine gentlemen, and we cut down our trees and raise money on mortgage to hunt three days a week and send our sons into the army. Believe you me, there’s a judgment on us, and the doom that was spoken of by the prophet Kilmallock has fallen.’

‘Isn’t it the prophet Malachi you refer to?’ said Mr. O’Toole.

‘Or Habakkuk, perhaps,’ suggested Lord Shandon, smiling.

‘Twas one of the two,’ continued Mr. O’Brien. ‘“Your fathers have turned away from the Lord, and your children shall be a gazing stock.” That’s what Ireland is now, sir, a gazing stock.’

‘Now, look here, Desmond,’ said Captain Boyle aggressively. ‘This Home Rule business is all damned nonsense, isn’t it? You know it as well as any of us.’

‘No,’ replied Desmond, ‘I don’t, but I should be interested to hear your reasons for thinking so, if you have any reasons.’ His tone suggested the indulgent reception of the ideas of an intelligent junior rather than a desire for information, and he succeeded beyond his expectations in exasperating his challenger.

‘Reasons, begad!’ he exclaimed. ‘Must we give reasons for being loyal subjects? Look here, young man, I read some of the things you said in those precious speeches of yours up at Dublin, and, begad, I’m ashamed of meself to find meself sitting here with me legs under the same table with you!’

‘If you stay much longer you’ll be under the table altogether, I expect,’ said Desmond. ‘Evidently you find claret and punch a bad mixture.’

‘D’ye hear ’m, O’Brien,’ cried the furious Captain, springing to his feet. ‘Am I to be insulted at your table by this fellow?’

‘Come, gentlemen!’ said Lord Shandon. ‘This is hardly a fair return for hospitality.’

‘Sit down, Boyle!’ Mr. O’Brien entreated. ‘Don’t be spoiling a pleasant evening. It’s a

happy occasion. Desmond saved my daughter's life, and I'd be sorry, Boyle, to see you quarrel with him at my table to-night.'

'But he insulted me, O'Brien,' cried the Captain. 'Didn't you hear him say me head couldn't stand the drop of punch I had.'

Desmond saw his host's distress, and came to his assistance without hesitation. 'I apologise for the suggestion, Captain Boyle,' he said with marked courtesy.

'And I accept your apology with great satisfaction, sir,' replied the Captain, extending his hand. 'I admit I hadn't a fair grip on me own tongue either.'

Lord Shandon gave Desmond a look of approval, and Mr. O'Brien was evidently much relieved. 'What do you say to joining the ladies?' he said, 'unless—— Shandon, you don't smoke. What do you say, Boyle?'

'Give me the ladies' society,' said the Captain, rising. ''Tis just what I need to smooth me ruffled plumage. Desmond,' he said, on their way to the door, 'could ye come over and dine with us on Tuesday?'

'Well, Connor, how did you enjoy your evening?' asked Michael an hour later, as they were walking home.

'Oh, all right,' replied Connor.

'I think your friend Kathleen is a dear.'

'She's not too bad,' Connor answered, with assumed indifference, his feelings at the time being equally perturbed by her charms and her airs.

'I like them all, and I'm sorry for them,' said Michael. 'They're doomed as a class. In another

thirty years these incompetent landlords will have ceased to exist. They put their faith in England, and England will desert them. If we win, and we're going to win, 'tis on these people the blow will fall first, and I wish to God it could be on the English money-changers who make our laws for us instead.'

'So do I,' said Connor, growing interested.

'Connor, the hope of throwing off this English yoke that burdens the country is worth living for,' he continued ardently. 'It is something for you and me to look forward to, and we must always make it our first aim.'

A boy's love is a sentiment of little depth; his hero-worship is his great passion. Connor was stirred by his brother's enthusiasm, and felt the magic influence of his leader. In the glorious prospect of standing by his hero's side in his fight against the enemies of his country the image of Kathleen O'Brien grew dimmer, and disturbing thoughts of her provoking charms troubled him no longer.

CHAPTER IV

CONNOR DESMOND AND KATHLEEN O'BRIEN

PATRIOTISM, once accounted the chief of national virtues, has been described in our own times as but an expression of collective selfishness. And certainly the forms which it assumes in the nations of the modern world, whose ideal is comfort, and whose fighting power is a matter not of valour but of money—whether it take the name of Imperialism or Socialism, whether it show itself in British acquisitiveness, or French hysteria, or Transatlantic vain-glory—the patriotism of to-day is very different from that of Rome or Elizabeth's England.

Prosperity is the arch-enemy of virtue, and it is easier for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven than for a rich nation to be a nation of patriots. With prosperity comes the lowered ideal, the lukewarm faith; and in lands where once the national honour was an inspiration the Bellygod has been set up for worship.

In Ireland, where national greatness has never been achieved—where, whether we seek the cause in our own faults of character or in the wrongs we have suffered from English oppression, failure and discord and discontent have marked every period of our history—in Ireland the national sentiment, the

ardent love of country, the belief in a noble ideal, have survived all discomfiture and outlived every humiliation. It is confined to no party or class ; it is as much an instinct with the landlords, who have distrusted the people and lost their opportunity of leading them, as with the peasants who remember old wrongs and look for the captain who will fight their battles. But something more than national sentiment, something more than love of country, is needed to make the leader. He must believe in the enemies of his country ; the fires of hostility must burn in his veins. He must have a goal clearly in view, and strike towards it without fear or scruple. Such a man was Michael Desmond. Love of Ireland, hatred of England, the traditions of his family, his mother's influence, his own personal ambitions, were combined forces that made him a fighter ; and his ability, his persuasive eloquence, and a quality of personal magnetism, which was felt by all those with whom he came into contact, gave him a power which marked him while still a young man as the future leader of his party.

His brother Connor was of different stuff. His love of Ireland was as true as Michael's, but no cherished memory of old wrongs, no hatred of present conditions, stirred him to action. His political ardour was tempered by his philosophical outlook on life, a scrupulous sense of justice ; and, while Michael condemned the landlords as a class because they supported the English alliance, Connor perceived their difficulties and recognised the claims of the greater number of them to be considered patriotic Irishmen. His brother was his hero, and he followed him politically, but with a certain reserve. At Trinity he was known as a staunch Nationalist,

but this did not interfere much with his popularity, for he had also shown himself to be a keen sportsman and a good comrade, and many of his special friends, Horace Croker, Lord Shandon's eldest son among them, belonged to the class against which his party had declared war. Without overworking himself he took a good degree, and without any special inclination for the law he fell in with his brother's wishes in choosing the bar as a profession. It was life itself, not the law nor any other department of the world's housework, that attracted him ; and if he looked forward to the career he had acquiesced in without enthusiasm, it was from no lack of vital energy, but because to young men of high spirit the beaten path is always dull. Indeed, in choosing a profession he is much in the same position as a girl called upon to take a husband when she is not in love. Both have dreams : he of the adventure, she of the gallant knight ; and they generally know they are dreams, and afterwards fulfil their parts as good citizen or honest wife without difficulty.

On the evening of Connor's return to Duhallow after the completion of his University course a letter to his mother from his uncle, Mr. Barrington, was given to him. His mother studied his face with interest as he was reading, and his father awaited his comments with a look of keen amusement in his eyes.

'DEAR SISTER,' he read—'I have just arrived in London, and shall be returning to Australia in a few weeks. We have seen very little of each other since our childhood, and when we did meet we generally quarrelled, but perhaps time may have improved my temper and taken the edge off your tongue, and we may both have enough affection for each other at the bottom of our hearts to make us forget old

hostilities. It was a real pleasure to me to have been of some assistance to you in the education of your boys, and why you should have ignored my proposal to take Connor into my business I cannot understand, unless you were offended at my saying that this might save him from the fate of becoming a rebel like his brother. I was about his age when I left our old home and determined not to add another to the list of idle young men who remain as encumbrances on impoverished estates. I know that when my father gave me the hundred pounds I asked for to take me to Australia he thought I should spend it and be back for the hunting season. When I did come the hundred was ten thousand. You see that, like all self-made men, I enjoy such reminiscences. At the time I could have wished a warmer welcome from you for my shy little colonial bride, and you must have found it hard to forget my opposition to your marriage to the man you loved. Let all this be forgiven. Your comrade is with you still, and I am glad of it, and mine is gone. Perhaps the pleasantest remembrance of that visit when I brought my wife over to Duhallow is of Connor. He was the only person at home when we arrived, and he took upon himself the duties of host, taking us round the place, telling us the legends of the Castle, and doing everything in his power to entertain us. He could not have been more than ten years old. My wife took a particular fancy to him, and I have always since thought of him with interest. I am now a very rich man, and having neither wife nor children to regulate my life or benefit by the result of my labours, my thoughts have perhaps naturally turned to my only near relations. I propose, therefore, to give myself the pleasure of paying you a short visit, and unless I hear from you to the contrary, I shall leave London next Wednesday and be with you the following evening. Please give my best regards to Desmond, and believe me, your affectionate brother,

DAN BARRINGTON.

‘And he came?’ asked Connor with interest as he laid down the letter.

‘Indeed he did,’ replied Mr. Desmond. ‘He

spent the day driving round the country looking up old places he remembered when he was a boy, and all the evening he was fighting with your mother, and I can tell you he found his match.'

'Twas about you, Connor,' said Mrs. Desmond. 'Your uncle is prepared to adopt you and make a rich man of you if you will adopt his views about the Union.'

"I made my money under the British flag," says he, "and I'm not going to leave it to any one who wishes to haul it down in Ireland," says he.' Mr. Desmond quoted his brother-in-law.

'He proposes to see you himself about it,' Mrs. Desmond went on. 'He said all he asks is that you should support the Union.'

'And change his name and take his own,' added her husband.

'And I told him he might save himself the trouble.'

'Oh, you did,' said Mr. Desmond, revelling in the remembrance of the scene. 'Faith, your mother had him answered. "Barrington's no bad name," says she, "but when I changed it for Desmond I found a better, and I'm thinking his father's son and Michael's brother won't want to change it back," says she. "I can not only help him, I can give him a position and prospects better than all the young fellows in the place. I can help him to regain the position in the county which his family once had," says he. "Michael is doing that for us," says your mother. "Connor has himself to consider," says your uncle; "I can put him in a position to buy back the old family property, the Court property that ought never to have gone into other hands, and he can do good work in the country without tinker-

ing with politics." And what's this your mother replied? "Don't be angry, Dan," says she, "if I say you remind me of a cleverer tempter than yourself—*all these things will I give unto thee.*" Mr. Desmond had a hearty laugh as he recalled the duel.

'Tis very kind of him to take an interest in me,' said Connor; 'but what's this he asks me to do? Change my principles? Oppose Michael?' He treated the proposition as a joke. 'His money would be very acceptable,' he added. 'Couldn't we induce him to adopt our views, perhaps?'

'Oh, he's as tough as a gad,' Mr. Desmond assured him. 'He'd no more give way than your mother herself.'

'He intends to see you, Connor,' said Mrs. Desmond, 'but I told him he need not waste his eloquence.'

'No. There was a traitor in the family once; I don't think there will be a second,' Connor answered. 'But 'tis a pity all the same. I shall not give up the hope of converting him.'

Nothing further was said on the subject. That his uncle's proposal could become any temptation to Connor never occurred to his mother, and the almost comical light in which it appeared to him as well as to his parents indicated the strength of National feeling which inspired the whole family.

Kathleen and Connor had not met for three years. She had been a good deal in England latterly on visits to friends, and his times at home had not coincided with hers. He had outgrown his boyish devotion, and she had been more interested in what she had heard of the hero of her childhood, Michael, who was rapidly becoming the hero of his countrymen

also, than of her old friend Connor. Nevertheless she was looking forward with considerable pleasure to meeting him again ; and he, full of happy recollections of their old alliance, was curious to see how the years which lead from childhood to womanhood had dealt with his old playfellow.

When a young man who is going to pay a visit to a lady proceeds in a leisurely fashion it is obvious that he is not in love. Connor, on his way to Ballyvodra the following afternoon, lingered to inspect some young horses in a field ; he looked in at the forge at the cross-roads for a chat with the smith, and he stopped for a word or two with every one he met. They were all his friends from childhood, and the pleasant greetings he received, the words that have the sound of flattery in English ears, were genuine expressions of affection. It was 'Glory be to God, Masther Connor, 'tis yourself. You're welcome kindly,' or 'What a fine splendid gintleman your honour's grown, to be sure !' ' 'Tis well and sthrong you're looking, sir, in spite of the hard work at the college.' 'Wasn't it Miss Kathleen said you were an illigant scholar and they couldn't taych you anny more at Dublin ?'

As he entered the gates of Ballyvodra he noticed that the place wore marks of neglect even more pronounced than when he had been there last. The gates were unhinged, the lodge almost in ruins. 'That's a great job you've made of the roof, Bat !' said he to the old lodge-keeper as he passed in, and observed that a tarpaulin rick-cover had been drawn over an immemorial hole ; and as he went up the avenue similar evidences of disorder—thistles in the grass, broken palings, horses on the lawn—met his eye. Close to the house he encountered Dan, the

youngest boy, who was practising with an air-gun at a target nailed to a tree, and after refusing an invitation to join in this sport he asked if Kathleen were at home.

'She's above in the kitchen-garden,' Dan replied with a mischievous grin. 'Is it courting you're going?' a piece of impertinence which he saw might entail an attack on his person, and immediately supplemented by flight.

The shrubbery through which Connor passed was a tangle of vegetation with marks of old adornment. Rockeries, overgrown bushes of fuchsia, and roses run wild, were half hidden in the long grass. A path, green with moss, led to the walled garden, where the gaps with fallen trees in them which he remembered on his first visit were still unfilled. But within the walled garden, enshrined in a wilderness of degenerate fertility, was a flower border as beautiful as care could make it. It was screened by a lavender hedge, at one end of which a cherry-tree overhung a garden seat. Close by, under the crumbling wall, a row of bee-hives stood behind a little plantation of hollyhocks. This was the one spot which Kathleen had been able to save from the general ruin, and on its embellishment she spent many hours of her leisure and as much of her scanty pocket-money as she could spare.

She herself, in a household where appearances had ceased to be considered, was like her dainty garden in its uncared-for surroundings. A man might not have been able to tell what it was in addition to her charm of face and figure that made her whole appearance so satisfactory; but a woman could have seen in little details of her dress or the ordering of her hair that thoughtful attention which is the

decoration of simplicity. For most men,—indeed, for most women,—she would at all times have won commendation as a charming presentment of fresh healthy young womanhood, with at least something more than the average endowment of good looks. And one might have noticed the mischief in her eyes, another the resolution of her mouth, without being able to decide where lay the chief attraction of a face which could not be called beautiful. But to Connor Desmond, as she came to meet him down the garden path, she looked so fair that he could conceive no alteration in her that would not have marred the picture. She, in turn, regarded him with critically observant eyes to see what change the three years had made in him. The boy whom she remembered had dark hair and eyes, and a rather grave face, quickly lighted up by laughter or enthusiasm. He was not greatly changed: taller and more robust than he had promised to be, and smarter generally in appearance than her picture of him, but still very much the boy she remembered him.

‘Connor, my dear old fellow,’ she said with frank comradeship, ‘I’m perfectly delighted to see you, and you’re hardly changed at all. Tell me, am I?’

‘Indeed you are,’ said he; ‘I remember a little girl with short frocks and hair tumbling over her shoulders, rather cheeky, and a bit of a tom-boy, and now!——’

‘A grown up young lady worried with household cares.’

‘I don’t see much sign of the worry.’

‘But indeed ’tis a fact. I can do nothing but think of the tenants who won’t pay, and the bills that won’t be paid, and the education of the boys, and

the poor old place going to rack and ruin. Connor, we're awfully poor.'

'We all are,' said he, 'I can sympathise.'

'And that's the one happy side of poverty,' she admitted; 'there's a freemasonry between us. We're not a bit ashamed of it, and we understand each other's difficulties. We can laugh about the things we can't afford to do. Millionaires have no chance of that. You haven't admired my garden.'

'Indeed 'twas yourself I was looking at,—but 'tis almost worthy of the gardener.'

'Oh!' she laughed, 'wouldn't you keep those little compliments you have learned to make in Dublin for my aunts? They love them.'

'Well,' said Connor stolidly, 'if you really want my opinion, I think it's a jolly good garden.'

'Yes,' she laughed again, 'I see 'tis completely thrown away on you. A garden is just a garden to you,—you don't see it in detail. Tell me, do you know any one who wants a perfect lady's hunter? I'm selling my chestnut mare.'

'And why so?' he asked.

'Why? Because I want the money, of course. There'll be no hunting for me next season. Come round to the stables and have a look at her. Be careful how you shut that door. Connor, my heart is broken with trying to keep the pigs out of the garden.'

They passed through the barrier which served as a gate into the courtyard, where everything was the same, only a little more ruinous than when Connor had first seen it in his boyhood. The sight of the white-washed outbuildings, the grass-grown cobblestones of the yard, and the water-butt standing in its accustomed place, brought back a pleasant memory

of his old adventure into the forbidden territory. It was the same place, but it had lost its mystery ; he had the same guide, but in the old times he had crossed the boundary fence against orders and won a sweetheart ; now, though Kathleen and he were good comrades, he felt that another barrier had grown up between them, — the world's artificial walls, the severing division of creed and party and money.

After the inspection of the mare they walked on through the haggard and across the fields. Kathleen seemed glad to talk confidentially of her troubles to her old friend.

‘Things are getting worse and worse, Connor,’ she said. ‘I know it, because I am looking after everything for papa now. I am steward and land-agent as well as gardener. The rents were never in such arrears, and we have no capital to work the land with properly. Then there are the boys to be thought of. Jack is seventeen and will be leaving school after this term. What am I to make of them? Can you advise me as to the best way of giving them a start in life without a penny to help them?’

‘I suppose my case is much the same, Kathleen. I had a fancy that old Dan Barrington, my mother's brother, was going to adopt me, but that's off. Now if you could get adopted by some rich old man——’

‘Indeed,’ she laughed, ‘they prefer marrying girls to adopting them ; and really this may be my fate. I shall certainly marry for money if I am lucky enough ; but rich men don't come for wives to this part of the world, and I may still be looking out for a husband when I am fifty, like my aunts.’

'You don't really mean that you would marry for money?'

'Indeed I do. I regard it as a duty.'

'Now suppose I were rich, very rich, would I have a chance?'

'How can I tell? You see you are not rich.'

'But if I were rich?'

'No, I don't think so. I am thinking of a rich olderly man, not of a young man.'

'But what difference does that make?'

'I should marry him for duty. He wouldn't expect me to be in love with him; and, of course, I could *never* be in love with you.'

'And please, why not?' he asked.

'Oh, one can always tell,—and you're my friend. But seriously, Connor, when your uncle comes down again I wish you would bring him over and introduce him to me. I cannot afford to lose such a chance, and he might take a fancy to me.'

'You're a desperately easy girl to fall in love with, Kathleen.'

'And then I should be your aunt,' she laughed, and noticing a shade of vexation in his face which he could not understand, she changed the conversation by calling his attention to a spot in the corner of the haggard where he had once assisted her and her brothers to bury a friendly-hearted dog.

'You saw Michael in the spring,' Connor remarked as they went on.

'Yes, I saw a good deal of him. Do you follow him in his political views?'

'Of course I do!' he answered.

'Of course, because he is your brother,—not because you think he is right.'

‘Oh, but he is right : the people and their hopes and their wrongs are behind us.’

‘What wrongs?’ she exclaimed with warmth. ‘They are poor and so are we. The country’s poor. You won’t make it richer by ruining the landlords.’

‘Who wants to ruin them?’ said Connor, sticking to his guns in spite of a desire to let her know that he would rather be fighting on her side than against her. ‘It is their own fault. They’ve missed their opportunity. They’ve lost their chance of running the country, and the people have determined to run it for themselves.’

‘How can you and I be friends, Connor,’ she said, ‘if you really mean that you are going to join in this attack upon us.’

‘Then why are you friends with Michael?’ he asked.

She hesitated a moment. ‘I suppose it is because he saved my life,’ she answered.

Their path had skirted the firwoods behind Ballyvodra and brought them to a little slope of rock and furze, beyond which the country lay open far down into the west. Green pastures met dark woodlands, and in the farthest distance the sun was setting behind the mountains of Kerry. It was the end of summer, the time of hay harvest in that country, and the cool evening air was full of the smell of mown grass.

Nothing more was said of the civil strife that divided his people from hers. They reverted to old times and the adventures of their childhood, and she led him to talk of their life in Dublin, and his prospects in the profession he had chosen. The sun had set, and it was beginning to grow dark. Distant sounds that would have been unheard by day—the

rumble of cart-wheels on some upland road, the note of a corncrake in an uncut meadow, the murmur of water in the river shallows—grew distinct in the twilight calm. Near them in the fir-trees the south-west wind whispered of the sea.

The world became a different place for Connor during that walk. He had fallen in love again very quickly—and what wonder? for he was at the age when this is easy for any young man with any pleasant girl, and she was so sweet and attractive-looking and merry-hearted that there would have been no excuse for him if he had not done so. Nevertheless it was clear that he had hardly yet become conscious of his condition, or he would not have imperilled his chance as a lover by presuming on the privilege of the old friend as he did when they were parting.

‘Three years ago, when I left home and said good-bye to you, Kathleen, I had a kiss,’ he said. ‘Will I get one now?’

‘Indeed you will not,’ she replied with spirit, but without any offence in her tone, giving him at the same time a smile which showed beyond doubt that for him her heart held no other feeling than friendship.

CHAPTER V

SIR HENRY DESMOND AND MISS TEMPLE-CLOUD

THE years which have brought prosperity to England have given to Ireland few rewards ; but while they have darkened the skies, scarred the hill-sides, and polluted the rivers of the land they endowed with wealth, they have left to the land they could not enrich its old heritage of beauty.

In Ireland there has been no progress, and over the green country are set no marks of age. In England there has been no pause, no turning backward, but, with her increase, the old woodland charm has passed from her shores. In many parts of the land, indeed, no country remains, and even away from the great manufacturing centres you feel that the village hidden among orchards, the little oases of moorland, the riverside meadows belong, not to the country, but to the nearest town, which is seldom far away. And more surely than the country itself has disappeared the country life of England. There are still regions on which seems to fall the very sunshine of Arcady, and yet they keep no hiding-place for Pan. The spirit of the country has forgotten them. In the old houses the new owners are no longer squires ; in the cottages the labourers are no longer peasants. These pastures have become

playgrounds for those whom the town has enriched, or breathing-places for those whom it has enfeebled ; but the self-contained simplicity of the old country wellbeing is found in them no more.

Photographs of the village of Wyck St. Mary might be seen in the panels of first-class carriages on the South-Western Railway, from which it might be inferred that its picturesqueness was sufficiently established to have a commercial value. They showed a pretty church spire surrounded by gabled cottages placed on a hill slope, with a stretch of the weald country for background. The place had all the outward appearance of pastoral seclusion, but though it was twenty-five miles from London, it was in reality little more than an outlying suburb. There were old and beautiful houses in the sheltered valley, and modern comfortable residences, generally conspicuous by the redness of their tiles and the extent of their glass adjuncts, on the wooded slopes of the ridge above the village ; nearly all of them were occupied by well-to-do business men, some of whom journeyed daily, others with less exacting duties only occasionally, to the city. These residents grew their own vegetables at considerable expense, and in many cases indulged in a little amateur farming, such as keeping cows and even pigs in model outbuildings. They constantly had little house parties, and would sing the delights of the country life to their town friends, bidding them breathe deeply of the air, or showing the friendliness of rural manners by stopping to greet one of the few rustic survivals of an older generation in the village with a familiar, ' Well, John, and how is the rheumatism ? ' or such like mark of sympathy which links the cottage and the castle.

The chief landowner and most important person

in the neighbourhood was Sir Henry Desmond, the direct descendant of that Henry Desmond who in the reign of good Queen Anne had disinherited his elder brother by becoming a Protestant. There was little Irish blood in his veins, as for several generations his ancestors had made English marriages, and the interest he took in his Irish property had been so small that he had hardly troubled to visit it. His attention had, however, been recently directed to it for two reasons. He was a politician with ambition and a growing reputation, at a time when Ireland was becoming the battlefield of English parties ; and Michael Desmond, who had leapt to the front as the leader of the Irish people, was his relative. He was considering how his connection with Ireland might be turned to good account and improve his chances for the appointment of Chief Secretary if his party were successful at the next general election. For his age of forty he was a man of large experience. At Oxford he had won approval, not only on the river but at the Union, and took a good degree without allowing his studies to interfere with his amusements. He had travelled round the world, and had produced a popular book on the British Empire. He had sown his wild oats judiciously without losing either his respect for himself or his chivalry for women ; and he was still at times in his relations with the fair the subject of gossip, never of scandal. He had begun his Parliamentary career with victory at the polls in a borough previously hostile to his party, and had continued it with an energy and tact which had brought him to the very threshold of the Cabinet. He stood before the country as a good specimen of that old-established class from which its leaders are drawn—a man of position and property, a good sports-

man and comrade, a practical man with a head for figures and statistics ; a good all-round Englishman.

Though for generations there had been no communication between the two branches of the Desmond family, the unexpiated wrong which divided them was still a vital force silently working to the fulfilment of destiny. The character of Michael Desmond was shaped by the inherited hatred of the dispossessed ; that of Sir Henry by the inherited sapience of the supplanter. Their paths were rapidly converging at the time when the representative of the younger branch claims our attention.

Wyck House was to the inhabitants of the neighbourhood as a temple set in sacred groves. To attend a garden-party there was a privilege ; to dance there a distinction ; but to be asked to dine marked the guest as one who was different from his neighbours. There was a little feeling of self-consciousness on this point among the residents of Wyck St. Mary, and the knowledge that they were perhaps over-gratified by such attentions led them to an assumption of indifference when speaking of the great family to each other. In one house the cards of Sir Henry and Miss Desmond were not allowed to lie uppermost in the card-basket in the hall, lest to the glance of a caller they should seem to have been left there designedly, while in another the invitation to dinner was not to be seen with the records of similar engagements on the library mantel-piece. English men and women venerate the class above them, but fear their own.

Miss Desmond, the hostess at Wyck House, was alone in the drawing-room expecting her guests. It was broad daylight, the windows were open, and a garden fragrance of wallflower and lilac was in the warm air. She caught a glimpse of her own picture

in a mirror as she crossed the room, and turned away impatiently, for she was at that age when an unmarried woman is critical of her own charms, and examines them in the same spirit as a man who has suffered pecuniary loss may scrutinise his balance at the bank.

Presently her brother entered, looking the embodiment of health and wellbeing and, at a first glance, hardly the elder of the two. For the brother there had been no quarrel with time : his whole appearance spoke of the repose of energies exercised and desires fulfilled. For the sister there had been the old unkind conflict with the years, and in her face was written that unrest which the passing seasons bring to her whose womanhood remains unexpressed in love.

‘How do we go in to dinner?’ he asked as he walked to the open window by which she was standing.

‘We must distribute our party among the local people,’ she replied. ‘You had better take Lady Thomas.’

‘H’m,’ he murmured. ‘Well, he’s a useful man, —a Liberal and a brewer, an unusual combination.’

His sister laughed. ‘This is one of your parties,’ she reminded him.

‘And who else is there?’

‘The Coxes and the Samuelses. I propose to give Mrs. Samuels to Mr. Severn.’

‘I don’t clearly remember her,’ said her brother.

‘Don’t you? She’s always at church. She’s a very imposing lady, and socially ambitious, I think.’

‘So is every one, Lucia. I suppose we should not object to a peerage in the family. Who else?’

‘Mr. and Mrs. Loftie. She’s a pretty child, and rather a favourite of mine.’

‘I remember. He is the good young man who runs the club and reads the lessons through his nose.’

‘I shall give her to M. de Lautreppe in the hope of making her husband jealous. Then there are the Babbages. Be careful to pronounce the name properly. It does not rhyme with cabbage. Since the son went into the army they have discovered that they are of French extraction, and you must say Babage as if it were a French word. And, oh! of course, the Temple-Clouds. We might entrust your friend Miss Temple-Cloud to the Admiral.’

‘Why *my* friend specially?’ he asked.

‘I wonder why her father was obliged to leave the army,’ said Miss Desmond, ignoring his question, ‘and why they should come and live in a cottage down here. Mrs. Temple-Cloud is a cousin or a niece to the Prime Minister, I think you said.’

‘Something of the sort. I met Miss Temple-Cloud there.’

‘Of course she’s beautiful, and a man’s woman.’

‘You are a good sister,’ he laughed, in a tone she did not like, for she understood him to refer to her vigilance in keeping the door of his house closed against young ladies who might aspire to succeed herself as its mistress. ‘Put her at my end of the table,’ he added.

Mr. Severn, a young barrister, who had become Sir Henry’s private secretary, entered the room and was followed almost immediately by Admiral Sir John Blakeney and Lord Culbone’s daughters, Mrs. Clan-Owen and Miss Knee. A few minutes later the first of the local guests were announced, and at the hour named for dinner the only people who had not arrived were the Temple-Clouds. Some introductions were made and little groups formed about the room and round the open windows. The word ‘charming’ became a recurrent sound. The praise of something obvious which had been previously un-

noticed,—the view, the evening, the flowers, or what not,—was on every lip and made little openings for conversation. The flowers led one couple to the London flower shops, another to the Primrose League. The sunset suggested in one part of the room the Royal Academy, in another the difficulty of obtaining good cooks in the country. Mrs. Babbage and Mrs. Samuels seemed hardly gratified at meeting each other on this their first occasion of dining at Wyck House, but their husbands shook hands cordially with a feeling of alliance and mutual support. Young Mr. Babbage having lived a year in military circles was almost too obviously at ease, and it was with a mixture of pride and apprehension that his mother heard him ask Mrs. Northover, the Archdeacon's wife, if she were not beginning to feel 'peckish.' Mr. Loftie had heard a gentleman introduced to his wife as M. Vicomte de Lautreppe, and had given her a smile of encouragement as though to assure her that there was nothing to be alarmed at. He was astonished and felt a sense of injury a few minutes later when he noticed that she was laughing gaily; it was not that she should enjoy herself, it was rather that she should see how frivolous were such gatherings, how superior the pleasures of the quiet evenings at home, that he had consented to her acceptance of the invitation.

Miss Desmond had already glanced more than once at the clock when her late guests were announced. Mrs. Temple-Cloud apologised for the absence of her husband,—an attack of gout sufficed for a reason, and her daughter, after exchanging greetings with her host and hostess, regarded with an air of calm enjoyment the bright gathering around her. She was herself incomparably the most attractive-looking woman in the room. Those who looked at her—

and none did so without approval—saw a girl, the beauty of whose figure seemed to have found its perfect expression. Her hair and eyes were very dark, and her face pale. She was dressed in black, with softening touches of white lace, and in her toilet she showed a certain individuality in defiance of current models,—in the arrangement of her hair, for instance,—which indicated that she knew and preferred the style which suited her to that which was fashionable at the moment. Such courage may be expected to win the approbation of men, but to please women also it must be most cunningly exhibited, and there was a daintiness of finish in the details of Miss Temple-Cloud's attire which left no suspicion that she was without the services of a maid or the advantages of money.

After exchanging a few words with Mrs. Temple-Cloud, Sir Henry Desmond crossed the room to Sir John Blakeney and indicated his companion to him.

'Oh, the bride! Delighted,' he nodded. 'Which of them is her fortunate husband? What, not married? But she has all the look of it.'

His introduction completed the preliminaries for the procession to the dining-room. The Admiral had arrived at the age when it is possible to appreciate the attractions of a fair comrade without neglecting those of a good dinner,—indeed he found them mutually stimulating. He and Miss Temple-Cloud were at once on good terms, and were talking to each other like old friends while other couples were still approaching one another with the little interrogations which usually supply the place of conversation between the newly acquainted.

Mrs. Samuels, a fair and handsome lady, whose noble bosom was to her bodice as a brimming river to half-inundated banks, began by asking Mr. Severn

if he recommended Eton as the best of public schools, a choice having to be made for their eldest boy. His reply that he was not able to judge, having been educated himself at a Grammar School, took her aback ; and feeling that the subject might be painful to him she changed it by inquiring if he were going to Scotland in August for the grouse shooting. His answer that he contemplated spending his holiday at Blackpool made her wonder how he came to be a guest at Wyck House, and she was listening rather pityingly to his praise of the rival attractions of Douglas in the Isle of Man when her ear caught the familiar sound of her husband's honest voice addressing Lord Culbone as 'My Lord.' She tried to meet his eye and deliver herself of a frown, but the good man remained unconscious of her anxiety or of his own indiscretion. To add to her discomfort she detected a smile on the face of Lieutenant Babbage, and was so annoyed that she barely heard the remarks of her companion, who continued to give glowing, if imaginary, descriptions of the amusements at popular watering-places.

Mr. Loftie made even less progress to intimacy in his conversation with Mrs. Clan-Owen. He was a young man to whom consciousness of moral rectitude had given considerable self-respect, and developed a certain superiority of tone which perhaps a young woman of the world like Mrs. Clan-Owen could not appreciate. At first he thought she must be shy or stupid, and made allowances for, throwing a tone of encouragement into his words ; but gradually a little misgiving assailed him, and it was with a feeling that there were very few subjects in life available for conversation that he drew her attention to the still uncurtained window.

‘The prospect from the window at this end of the room is very fine, is it not?’ he remarked.

‘Oh yes,’ she answered with a glance at the window.

‘The view from the window at the other end is very good also,’ he continued less confidently after a moment’s pause.

‘Oh yes, very,’ she replied, without looking either at him or the window. He turned from one window to the other: the pause oppressed him. With the whole world, with human life and all its interests to choose from, only one could he think of.

‘You may often see a fine prospect from one window, but it is a great advantage to have a good one from two windows in the same room,’ he said.

‘Oh yes, charming,’ she replied, turning to the Archdeacon and leaving her companion to observe how excellently his wife and M. de Lautreppe were entertaining each other. Indeed, the gallant Frenchman had led that young lady, who had been at school in Normandy, to talk to him in his own language, with a result which they both found extremely amusing. Mr. Loftie was filled with resentment. He was accustomed to feel that his wife leant on him, that she could take real pleasure in nothing which he did not share, and now he saw her in a quite unwonted mood of high spirits. He was sorry that he had come and he resolved that there should be no more such evenings.

The presence of the Temple-Clouds at Wyck House so soon after their arrival in the locality commended them socially to those of their neighbours who were present, and gave probability to the rumour that Mrs. Temple-Cloud was a relation of the Prime Minister. Mrs. Babbage, who was sitting opposite to her, expressed a regret that a pressure of engage-

ments had hitherto prevented her from calling, but said she hoped to have the pleasure almost immediately. Lady Thomas, who had called, but influenced perhaps by the length of time it took to answer the bell and by the shabbiness of the furniture, had on the occasion been a little condescending, now revised her judgment, and determined to show the new family some graceful attention at the first opportunity. They were evidently very nice people, though perhaps not well off, and there was probably no truth in the report that the Major had been seen in a state of intoxication. If it were true, it was not for them to allow this to influence their feelings for the wife and daughter. They understood the meaning of the word 'Charity,'—so, the good ladies. And the good gentlemen had no need of making demands on this Christian virtue. As far, at least, as the daughter was concerned they were prepared to accept her cordially, and felt some envy of the men at her end of the table. Mr. Babbage, junior, who thought himself rather wasted on Mrs. Cox, a golfing lady of weather-beaten countenance, took a good many glances in Miss Temple-Cloud's direction; and Mr. Severn, who was nearer, noticed, with some amusement, the interest with which his host regarded her, and how often he seemed to be listening to her conversation with the Admiral when he was apparently attending to the remarks of Lady Thomas.

When a young man is attracted by a young lady, and most desires to shine, he is least likely to do so; but with the elderly man of the world it is different: it is when he is attracted that he does himself most justice. So it was now with Sir John. He was at this time one of the most popular men in England, a sailor politician of bluff speech, liked by men, even

by those who thought with Severn that he would have been better employed in following his profession at sea than in talking about it in Parliament, and with ladies of all ages he was universally a favourite. He had the art of skipping the tedious preliminaries to intimacy and at once establishing an alliance with a fair acquaintance.

'Capital idea this of Desmond's, bringing his friends and country neighbours together. Their habits are so different and it's good for them both,' he said to Miss Temple-Cloud confidentially, and in a tone that suggested to her acute perception that he made some social distinction between the two groups.

'I feel it is doing me immense good,' she replied; and added laughing, 'mightn't it turn out afterwards like the experiment Bulwer Lytton made at Knebworth? Do you remember?'

'No. Probably I never heard.'

'He thought his literary London friends and his country neighbours would benefit mutually by meeting, and he got them together at Knebworth. The literary men had long hair and curious manners, and didn't dress properly. They're nearly as bad to-day, don't you think?'

'Don't know any,' said the Admiral.

'And they were quite ignorant about sport, and the young squires were ignorant of everything else. He thought they'd improve each other.'

'And did they?'

'They were very civil to each other, but afterwards one of the young squires said to another: "Who were those people we met at dinner?" "Oh," said the other, "I think it's the Foresters."'

'Capital!' the Admiral laughed. 'Foresters! But which is the Forester party here? Am I one of them?'

'After all, I suppose there's hardly any distinction now,' she answered, 'except the rich and the poor. I'm one of the poor.'

He shook his head, failing to find words to express delicately his recognition of the wealth which she possessed in her personal endowments.

'And,' she continued, 'have to accept it. That is the worst of being a woman. Women have no chance of making a career for themselves, except perhaps a few gifted actresses and singers.'

'What about marriage?'

'Oh,' she replied in a tone of contempt, 'put it to yourself! You are a sailor who has won distinction at sea and on shore. You know what it means to work and have a career. Picture the difference if you had been obliged to sit still and wait, with a possibility of stepping into the rewards without doing the service.'

The Admiral gave her a keen look of attention before he replied, and she laughed to cover the warmth of her protest.

'You're a rebel!' said he.

'Oh no! Rebellion is ridiculous. We must play our proper parts. But what a difference in the parts! A man makes a career by serving his country; a woman by making herself pleasing to a man.'

'Or to many men.'

'And then she's in danger.'

'No, not if she's clever. She may use her power wisely.'

'Then it must be all humbly devoted to one man. If she exercises it on more than one man she becomes disloyal. Unless,' she added laughing, 'she happens to be a queen. That seems to me the one career in which a woman can exercise all her best

faculties and make full use of her attractions. You see I think we are only fit for the smallest parts or the greatest,—to be queens or housewives,—and as there are only about a dozen queens in this world—no, not so many——’

‘You don’t count kings’ wives, then,’ said Sir Henry, taking an opportunity he had been waiting for to join in the conversation.

‘Oh no!’ she smiled back at him; ‘they are not really queens. They must obey.’

‘And should your real queen have a husband?’

‘It would be better not, but I expect she would want one.’

‘It must be a difficult position to be the husband of a queen,’ said he. ‘But, speaking seriously, Miss Temple-Cloud, don’t you think that women are beginning to show themselves very formidable competitors of men in all sorts of ways?’

‘No,’ she replied.

‘There are some professions——’

‘Only their drudgery. There are nurses and typewriters, not doctors and lawyers.’

‘And art and literature?’

‘They only copy. It may amuse them, but they ought not to compete.’

‘No!’ said the Admiral. ‘They are the prizes.’

‘That’s very nicely expressed, Sir John,’ said Mrs. Northover.

‘Well, if that is so,’ observed Mr. Severn reflectively, ‘it seems to me there are more prizes than competitors.’

‘I must say I think it is rather humiliating to women to speak of them as prizes,’ said Mrs. Cox.

‘I thought it was rather complimentary,’ said Severn. ‘I wish I were a prize.’

'We must put him up in a consolation race,' said the Admiral. 'And what do you consider makes a man a prize?' he asked, turning to Miss Temple-Cloud.

'Of course he must have achieved something. He must have made himself felt.'

The Admiral and his host smiled, both feeling that they might claim this distinction; though the satisfaction of the former was somewhat clouded by the reflection that, as a prize, he had already been secured.

Severn remarked that it was not so much the man who had made a name as the man who was making one who interested his fellow-creatures, especially the fair sex.

'Why?' asked his host. 'Because he is generally younger?'

'Partly; but chiefly because he has not played his hand, and there may be anything in it. You can count the other fellow's tricks.'

'I don't think we necessarily admire success,' said Miss Temple-Cloud, looking across at Mrs. Northover.

'No,' she assented. 'We admire goodness and unselfishness.'

'And heroism, only we seldom see any.'

The conversation had gradually extended down the table, and Mr. Loftie felt it his duty to challenge the last remark. 'I cannot agree to that,' he said in his deep manful tones. 'Heroism may be seen amongst us daily. The truest heroism is shown less in big things than in the duties of daily life.'

'That's right,' said Severn, addressing Miss Temple-Cloud. 'This very neighbourhood, I am convinced, is a perfect nest of heroes.'

'I only count the fighting sort,' she answered.

‘It need not be in war, but there must be a fight. Now in politics, whether you agree with him or not, who can help admiring Mr. Desmond, the leader of the Irish party.’

‘What!’ exclaimed her host.

‘Michael Desmond, that rebel!’ cried the Admiral.

His name was pitched up and down and across the table in terms of strong disapproval.

‘You cannot admire a man without principles,’ said Sir Henry.

‘Oh, but he has principles, though they may not be the same as ours,’ Miss Temple-Cloud contended.

‘A programme, if you like, but not principles,’ he corrected her.

‘Not much difference, is there, between principles and a consistent programme?’ Severn interposed.

‘Nonsense!’ cried the Admiral. ‘The whole programme may be unprincipled. Desmond’s is.’

‘I was not thinking of his principles,’ said Miss Temple-Cloud. ‘But he’s a great man and a leader of men,—the leader of a nation. The whole of his country looks up to him and follows him.’

‘You’re not a Home Ruler, are you?’ asked Sir Henry, speaking to the girl as seriously as though she were a brother politician.

‘I know nothing about politics,’ she laughed; ‘but I am sure I should have been a Home Ruler if I had been Irish.’

‘Well, he’s a remarkable fellow,’ said Sir Henry,— ‘a man to be reckoned with. Perhaps I ought to be rather proud of that, as he is a distant cousin of mine, though I don’t know him personally. He may be a better companion outside the House than he is inside it. He has an unpleasant way of keeping us up all night and interfering with our dinner-hour.’

‘And so you are really going to Ireland this summer instead of Scotland, Sir Henry,’ said Mrs. Northover. ‘I think it is very brave of you, for, of course, though you may be one of their best friends they will regard you as a political enemy, and they are so violent and so ungrateful for all that England has done for them. My husband says they are always making unreasonable demands and always asking at the wrong time.’

‘Like the widow in the parable who asked the man for bread when he was in bed with his children,’ said Miss Temple-Cloud.

‘Really!’ protested Mrs. Northover. ‘Now really!’

‘But he had to get up, madam,’ the Admiral laughed. ‘He had to get up. The old lady knew what she was about. And Ireland’s playing the same game, and there isn’t a party in England strong enough to put a stop to it.’

Miss Temple-Cloud’s allusion to Michael Desmond had furnished a subject for conversation, and Ireland had become the general topic. Lady Thomas attributed her misfortunes to the laziness of the peasantry: Mr. Loftie, apparently forgetting that M. de Lautreppe was sitting near, attributed it to the influence of the priests. Mrs. Babbage had seen, however, that the remark had not escaped M. de Lautreppe, and thought it would be kind to reassure him. ‘Not that there’s any disgrace in being a Roman Catholic,’ she said, and received in acknowledgment a smile and a bow such as might have been made in return for a compliment.

Hardly any one present had more knowledge of Ireland than had been learned from English newspaper articles or a visit to Killarney; and the tone

in speaking of the country was that of England generally towards the outside world—the tone of a superior not unprepared to make allowances for the faults and even to see the good qualities in an inferior. Miss Temple-Cloud was the only person present who took exception to this tone, and she was not herself specially interested in Ireland. Her opposition was probably stirred by her perception of something analogous in the relations between Ireland and England to those between men and women. She admitted, saw as inevitable, but resented, the man's dominance, the woman's dependence. She saw that woman conquers him, not by her own strength, but by taking advantage of his weaknesses; and while perhaps ready to adopt such a course herself she despised the necessity. So at least her remarks to the Admiral at the close of the conversation indicated, when some one asked who it was had said that England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity.

'O'Connell said it first, I fancy,' Sir Henry replied.

'A good many people have repeated it.'

'It is the remark of an inferior,' said Severn.

'Of the weaker,' Miss Temple-Cloud corrected.

'Yes,' said the Admiral. 'If we'd been united in England we could have governed Ireland with a strong hand and kept her in her proper place; but one party in England always opposes what the other party does, and Ireland takes advantage of it.'

'That's just the chance of the weak against the strong,' said Miss Temple-Cloud. 'That has been the way with man and woman. Yes, I'm sure that what emancipation we have has been won in the same way as Ireland's, and we're neither of us satisfied. If men had not been divided into two camps they would still have been polygamists.'

‘What a notion!’ exclaimed Mrs. Northover, rising with the other ladies.

‘And I believe they would have preferred it,’ said Miss Temple-Cloud, firing a parting shot at the Admiral.

It has been suggested as a proof that men of our days are more appreciative than our forefathers of ladies’ society that they make the interval of separation after dinner shorter than formerly. The inference may be correct, though perhaps we may too exclusively claim as the index of our gallantry a custom which is partly due to our humbler attitude of head and stomach in the presence of Port, and partly to the modern craving for tobacco. The interval to-night was even shorter than usual—too short for Lord Culbone and Admiral Blakeney—but their host’s suggestion of cigarettes on the terrace was generally acceptable. The daylight lingered, the drawing-room windows were open, and some of the ladies were walking on the terrace when the men joined them. Some one was playing the piano, and though no one listened the effect was soothing. Groups formed, couples separated; there was altogether a pleasant informality about the reunion.

There is indeed no time in the day when social intercourse is so pleasant as the hour following dinner—certainly no other time when a man approaches a woman with so much assurance. He is never so ready as then to be attracted, and his consciousness of physical wellbeing gives him a confidence, an easy familiarity which is seldom ill received.

Sir Henry Desmond, who had secured Miss Temple-Cloud, and was leading her down one of the dusky garden paths, found no difficulty in striking the personal note.

'This helps to make up for not having you next me at dinner,' he said. 'The worst of being a host is that he has always to give his most charming guest to some one else.'

'Whatever Irish blood you still have left must be your excuse for that compliment,' she answered.

'No, I am speaking as an Englishman, as one who balances profit and loss. Ever since that evening at the Prime Minister's I have been looking forward to renewing our conversation.'

'I am afraid I have forgotten what it was about.'

'As to whether friendship was really possible between a man and a woman.'

'Oh yes,' she said, 'I remember. You said it was only possible when the woman was without personal attractions.'

'And you said it was only possible when each of them was in love with some one else. Perhaps we were both right.'

'Or both wrong.'

'I wish we could test it,' said he. 'Certainly you don't fulfil the first condition, nor I the second. But mightn't we try the experiment?'

'Well,' she laughed, 'how shall we begin? I suppose it should be by mutual confidences. You see we hardly know each other.'

'And why should we wait to hear about each other from third persons?'

'All right,' she said. 'If you like we'll exchange biographies. Shall we? No, perhaps after all we had better not. The only interesting things about people are those things they do not care to tell. That's why a novel is more interesting than a biography. The biographer doesn't know, or won't tell, the secrets.'

He noticed with admiration as they walked on how graceful was her bearing, and how beautifully her head was set on her shoulders.

‘But you have no secrets,’ he said.

‘Of course I have, and so have you,’ she said, looking at him with a very engaging smile.

They passed a little summer-house overlooking a sheet of water. ‘Shall we sit down here?’ he suggested. ‘It would be a good place for telling secrets.’

She consented without hesitation, and as he sat down beside her the possibility of adventure made his pulses beat a little faster than usual. He had never been more inclined than now to trespass across the line where flirtation ends and privilege begins, but though a skilful reader of the signals of that borderland he was by no means certain of his reception. She seemed to invite his advances, to beckon him on, without showing the weak spot in her defences; leaving him the chance of getting a rebuff by going forward, or of earning the reproach of the laggard, on whom opportunity is wasted, by hesitating.

‘I am afraid you are not a very good host,’ she said, ‘to desert your guests in this way.’

‘They are quite contented,’ he replied; ‘my sister will look after them. She likes it. But I—one of my guests claims all my attention.’

‘It may lose you several votes.’

‘I have only one constituent to-night.’

‘Your friendship develops amazingly quickly,’ she said; but her smile was encouraging and misled him.

‘How could it be otherwise?’ he said ardently. ‘You create it. Most girls chill friendship,—pre-

vent at the outset a possibility of romance in the relationship of man and woman by regarding every man as a possible suitor. They are dealers with charms to sell, favours to negotiate, not to give. One woman in a thousand is different. She meets the man she likes on equal terms. She is rich enough to confer without loss to herself.'

She was silent for a few moments while she considered the full import of his words.

'Of course,' he went on, 'between a man and a woman friendship is never the exact word. I could never be merely your friend.'

'Why?' she asked simply.

'I should fall in love with you.'

'That might be amusing,' she laughed. 'A man is always amusing when he is in love.'

He understood that she tripped lightly with intention over dangerous ground.

'There is nothing,' said he, 'that a man dislikes so much as to be amusing to the lady he adores. And yet I can even risk that.'

He took her hand and she placidly allowed him to retain it. She was curious to see how he would proceed.

'We were going to exchange confidences,' he said, 'to tell each other one of our secrets.'

'Well,' she replied, 'you begin.'

'Wouldn't it be better,' he whispered, 'if instead of telling old ones we had a new one between us.'

In the dusk he could not see the flash of scorn in her eyes. He drew her hand towards him and leaned closer to her. In another moment he would have kissed her if she had not risen.

'Some men,' she said, speaking almost unconcernedly, 'are said to have an instinct as to how far

they may venture in the way of familiarity with a girl. Somehow I thought you were one of them.'

He saw that he had hopelessly blundered.

'She who possesses not only the charm which compels us to be rash but the generosity which forgives the indiscretion, is a queen among women,' he said, trying to extricate himself.

'I must take you back to your guests, Sir Henry,' she said, passing out of the summer-house before him.

He perceived himself a contemptible and perhaps a ridiculous figure in her eyes, and craved for reinstatement. He had offered himself as a lover, not as a suitor, but the latter part was still possible. He saw that by essaying it he might redeem his position; but indeed it was a force far stronger than any desire to avoid her condemnation that impelled him to choose it. He was attracted as he had never been before. 'Love' it might not be called; but a passion to possess what had seemed so near and had suddenly become so distant filled him, and showed him his only hope in the path which leads to the altar.

Admiral Blakeney, smoking a cigar, strolled towards them down the garden path, and as soon as he was distinguishable Miss Temple-Cloud ran to meet him.

'Oh,' she cried, 'you're so welcome. Sir Henry has been trying to demonstrate to me the inferiority of our sex, and I want a champion.'

'My dear young lady,' said the Admiral, laughing, 'I am always at your service, but I believe you can hold your own. Isn't that true, Desmond?'

A week later, newspapers supplying fashionable intelligence announced the engagement of Sir Henry

Desmond, Bart., M.P., of Wyck House, Surrey, and Duhallow Court, Co. Cork, to Corinna, only daughter of Major and Mrs. Temple-Cloud, and grand-niece of the Prime Minister.

It was an event of interest to numerous friends of the politician and to many ladies of his acquaintance who had daughters. His sister concealed her disapprobation with the best grace she could assume. At Wyck St. Mary the good ladies who had already called upon Mrs. Temple-Cloud congratulated themselves on their promptness, while those who had not done so decided to wait a little longer, lest this neighbourly civility might be misconstrued as a snobbish desire to show attention to the future mistress of Wyck House.

Miss Temple-Cloud herself was well pleased. To make what the world calls a good match was an essential part of her plan of life, and Sir Henry Desmond was able to give her the position she sought to fill. She was satisfied : she could not have asked for a more attentive or respectful lover ; but in meditating on their relationship she did not forget the steps by which he had first approached her.

CHAPTER VI

THE INCREDIBLE VERDICT

Love, without which there is no romance, is the most prosaic of taskmasters, and sets men to the performance of the dulllest duties and the least romantic labours. It is the smile in a girl's eyes that makes the young adventurer give up the voyage to Eldorado for a safe seat on an office stool ; a whisper of love that compels the aspiring poet to forsake the path to Parnassus for the tram-line to his father's factory. Love made Connor Desmond, who had vague dreams of serving his country and definite tastes for out-of-door pursuits, a serious, hard-working student of the law ; and in the hope of winning a position which might justify him in asking Kathleen O'Brien to be his wife, he toiled in his musty chambers in Dublin with a zeal which promised him the reward of success in his profession.

Each time he had seen Kathleen on his occasional visits to Duhallow he had fallen more deeply in love with her, but he had made her no direct proposal of marriage. Her frank comradeship had seemed to arm her against any nearer approach, and he had feared to risk the probability of a refusal at a time when his own fortunes gave him no right to expect

anything else. 'I can only marry a rich man,' she had said at one of their meetings, 'and I wish he would not be so long in appearing, for things are getting desperate. If we go on much longer the old place will have to be sold.' The thought of his uncle's offer to him came temptingly at this time. To have been able to come forward as the lover who might claim the right of freeing her from her difficulties, whether she rewarded him or not by her hand, was a magnificent dream, but it was a dream only. Mr. Barrington had renewed his proposals, he had seen Connor himself, and had urged him to accept them, but he had been firm about his conditions. He had insisted on a repudiation of Michael's policy, which was becoming more and more opposed to the principles he held himself; and, though disappointed, he had gone away feeling a respect for the young man who could sacrifice a fortune rather than be disloyal to his brother and his family traditions.

Year by year Michael Desmond's power in the country and influence with his colleagues grew; and he was still, for a politician, a young man when he was chosen as leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party. It was a troubled time in Ireland. Agricultural depression and a general discontent, fanned by political organisations, had led to an outbreak of agrarian crime. Desmond was in no way responsible for it, but undoubtedly it helped his political ends—and he did not use his influence to check it. He threw the entire blame on the system of government, which he maintained produced a state of things which made popular passion unrestrainable. Measures of coercion were adopted by the Government, and were answered by violent speeches from

the representatives of the people. Of these, one from Desmond was made the occasion of his imprisonment on the charge of seditious conspiracy—a mistaken move on the part of the Government, for a surer way to increase his popularity and extend his influence could hardly have been found.

His release at the end of a few months was made the occasion of a great public welcome. In recent times Dublin had not seen so marked a demonstration. Since the death of O'Connell no leader had arisen who appealed to the popular imagination like Desmond: he had given Irish sentiment, Irish aspirations, a new meaning, and had translated it to England in terms which could not be misunderstood or ignored. He had shown the gift which others lacked of uniting and organising the national party until it had become a power to be feared and reckoned with in English politics. The more hateful his name became in the country of the ruler the more highly was it honoured in his own. His imprisonment had been regarded as a national affront—his liberation as a national victory.

Immediately after his release Desmond made his last appearance at the Bar as counsel for the defence in a murder case of unusual interest. The attention of the whole country had been drawn to it, and in the neighbourhood of Duhallow, where the tragedy had taken place, the excitement was intense.

A man named Costello, a tenant of Sir Henry Desmond, had been evicted from his holding, and another local man, one Rahilly, in spite of the warnings of both friends and enemies, had taken the vacant farm. Rahilly was shot in his house, and the suspicion fell on Costello, who bore a bad reputation

and had been heard to vow vengeance on the new tenant—the only direct evidence against him, however, being that of Rahilly's wife, who stated that as she was approaching the house in the dusk of the evening of the murder she had heard a shot fired, and a minute afterwards had seen Costello rush past her in the lane. Popular sympathy was divided: the man who took up a holding from which another had been evicted was regarded as a traitor to his class, the man who killed him as hardly a murderer. On the other hand, the people were shocked by the horror of the crime and filled with pity for the wife of the dead man, a woman whom every one respected. The case gained an additional interest from the fact that Michael Desmond had undertaken the defence of Costello. He had at this time almost given up his practice at the Bar, but influenced by strong political motives, and bent on throwing the burden of the crime on the Government which upheld the existing land system, he made an exception of this instance.

One day in August it spread through the countryside that Desmond would arrive at Duhallow that evening, and that the news of the verdict would come with or before him.

Duhallow, with its special claim to honour the national hero and its special interest in the murder, had good reason to feel justified in making holiday on this afternoon. The village had been thronged with people throughout the afternoon, and towards evening the old courtyard of the Castle was occupied by a large crowd. It consisted of followers of the Desmonds, tenants from the mountains, farm-labourers, idlers from the village, and families of itinerant beggars who were preparing to spend the night in the

outhouses : some standing in groups, some sitting on the ground or perched on the stack of turf which stood in the middle of the yard, while others were gathered round the kitchen door, where they were receiving refreshments in the shape of potatoes and buttermilk. You would have thought from the good spirits of the crowd that it was met to celebrate a wedding or some cheerful festival, whereas the occasion was really a solemn one, and the deepest anxiety prevailed.

In England they say, 'Two's company, three's none.' In Ireland the proverb should run, 'Two's company, three's better' ; for it is just the presence of the third, the welcome audience, that stimulates wit, encourages personalities, promotes quarrels, and effects reconciliations. Where three people meet fun begins, and as you multiply the numbers you increase the entertainment. And so it was now, that though the hearts of these people were full of trouble they were spending the hours of suspense in the merriest holiday fashion.

The arrival of Tom Begley, the blind poet and fiddler of local celebrity, was hailed with great satisfaction, for his presence always added to the fun and promised a dance. After being entertained in the kitchen and paying Mrs. Singleton, the cook, a compliment in rhyme, he emerged ready to display his twofold gifts. By going round the country in this way he managed to get a living—not a luxurious one ; but, as he said himself in a poem on the subject,

*O'Rippides, that grand Athaynian bard,
Lived upon dilisk when the times was hard,*

and why therefore should he complain?

'Just give us a line or two of the pothry you've

been repating to Mrs. Singleton, Tom,' he was asked as he emerged from the kitchen.

'Indeed I will not, Paddy Roche,' he replied with dignity; 'twas intinded for the lady's own ear.'

'Twas, to be sure,' added another. 'Where's your manners, Paddy?'

'Oh, but 'tis a great thing to be a po-ut,' remarked a third admiringly. 'How do you be making it all up, Tom?'

'I couldn't tell you meself,' Tom answered; 'tis what's called the inspiration.'

'Tis that and nothin' else. And thim rhymes, Tom, how do you be bringing thim together so nately now?'

'Phaix,' he replied with a grin, 'they just come to me in twins, like Mary Mahony's babies.' An answer which raised a hearty laugh against Pat Mahony, the father of the babies, who was one of the group.

'Well,' said one, 'pothry's fine for making ye remember things, good and bad, but music's fine for making ye forget, and 'tis a chune we want now while there's throuble all around us. Come along, boys, and have a step or two while we have a shance.'

Tom Begley was led across the grass-grown courtyard and seated on the stack of turf, in front of which an old coach-house door was laid on the stones for the dancers. He was a man of striking appearance: his face massive, weather-stained, wrinkled like a pool of peat water in a gust of wind, sightless, but lightened or shadowed by quickly changing expressions of emotion; and his garb, unlike that of those around him, retaining the knee-breeches and other characteristics of an older generation. Throned on his turf stack, fiddle to chin, above the expectant

crowd, he was a proud man, for he knew his power over the people, and how easy it would be for him in their present excited state to promote their laughter or change it to tears.

'What chune will it be?' he asked, drawing the bow across the strings. "Paddy O'Rafferty"? "Kitty lie over"? I can't plaze ye all, so we'll biggin wid "Paddy Carey." Start away, boys! Andy Burke and Danny Callaghan, sure enough. You have your father's own step, Andy. God rest his sowl!' And thus fiddling, listening to the dancing, and interjecting remarks, he continued till the first couple was tired.

'Well, we'll have "Kitty lie over," now,' he went on, as another couple stood up. 'Well stepped, Dan. Honor, your feet are like wather ripplin' wid the breeze of the music. Oh, 'tis a great chune and fine words,' and he sung as he played:

'Oh, what'd I do if I married a soldier?

Kitty lie over close to the wall.

Shure he'd lave me behind and go away rover,

Kitty lie over close to the wall.

Fine classhical wards,' he grinned. 'Faith they are, and right well danced. 'Tis a trate to play to a couple the likes o' ye.'

Dance followed dance; and meanwhile no present care, no thought for the morrow, assailed a heart in that burdened and poverty-stricken crowd. The blind fiddler alone among them had the inward vision of the dark background to the bright scene.

He himself struck the first note of change in the feelings of his audience by his criticism of the dancing of one of the couples. They were women in this case: the elder, ugly and ungainly, the younger, the

prettiest and most graceful in the village ; but Tom was a connoisseur of dancing in spite of his blindness, and his accustomed ear detected, as a musician following the score of an instrument, the accomplished performer in the elder woman, the crude beginner in the younger. 'Twas well enough,' said he, resenting the misplaced applause, 'and you'll be a great dancer yet, Lizzie Linnahan, if you'll not be above taking a few lessons from Mrs. Grady.'

'Faith, 'tis thrue, Mrs. Grady have all the steps,' said one of those who had been loudest in praise of Lizzie Linnahan.

'Oh then, indeed,' croaked an old beggar-woman, squatting on the ground, 'would anny o' the boys be wantin' to look at an ould woman's feet when there was a pretty colleen's eyes smilin' at him ?'

'Phaix, then, justice is blind they do be saying, and that's well proved by Tom Begley this miny yet,' said an old labourer.

'Begorra ! 'tis blind and deaf too in Ireland, I'm thinking,' said Tom, in a changed tone.

'Whishper, Tom ! will they hang James Costello ?' asked an old cottier, and the crowd gathered closer round the fiddler, the dancing forgotten.

'Tis a bad case, and there's no dacenter 'ooman in the parish of Duhalla than Mary Rahilly,' he answered evasively.

'Twas a blow sthruck for Ireland,' said a half-clothed tramp, a stranger in the place.

'Tis the will o' God,' said another.

'Tis a bad day for Ireland when we're driven to shed our own blood to help the cause,' said Tom sorrowfully.

'God help us ! 'tis terrible,' said another ; 'but there's a judgment on thraitors.'

'And there's a judgment,' said Tom, raising his voice, 'on them that ruined the land and robbed us of our own, and made men mad till the rayson's gone and the blow's sthruck. Oh, if there's hanging to be done 'tis for them the most rope's wanted—but they're safe over in England.'

'I believe in the dinnamite,' whispered the tramp.

'We're better widout it,' said Tom sternly. 'Wid the help o' God we'll have our own yet, and if anny one can see justice done for Ireland 'twill be Michael Desmond. Look what he've done already. All Ireland behind him, all our mimbers like one man at his call, Parlamint and all England afraid of him. Home Rule for Ireland is nearer than ye think, and 'tis his honour Mr. Desmond of Duhalla and no other will do it.'

'Who else indeed! where's the like of him? God give him health and strength,' and 'Shouldn't we be proud of the ould stock!' cried several in chorus.

'The ould stock! Yes, indeed!' cried Tom Begley, grown eloquent. 'And haven't he been chayted out of his own too, like the best of Irish blood? Who owns the Coort estate which should be Masther Michael's? who but the dirty lavings of the mimber of the family that turned Prothestant and thraitor, and robbed his brother. A fellow that lives over in England and never comes near us in his life, and spins the rint he col-lects through an agint, in cards and whorin', and plush to make calves for his rampikes of coachmen. Begobs! 'tis well for him he don't show his yallow face over here.'

Tom's picture of the absentee landlord raised a laugh in spite of the gravity of the subject.

'He's here already,' said Hickey the blacksmith, who had just joined the group, 'above at Lord Shandon's. I heard tell 'twas displased he is at the time 'tis takin' repairin' the Coort.'

'Phaix, he's spendin' a mint of money there,' said Paddy Roche, 'plastherin' and paperin' and diggin' up the dhrains.'

'Oh, well, 'tis good for thrade,' said Hickey.

'Tis then, for the Cork men that have the contrhact, but much good 'twill be for anny one in Duhallow,' grumbled Tom.

'There's Duhallow men working for the con-thractor,' said Hickey; 'but they know their duty, and, begorra! 'tis damn bad work they're doin'.'

This piece of news was greeted with general approval and seemed to wake Tom Begley's muse.

'The inshpiration's on me, boys!' he said, 'and 'tis just wantin' a little coaxin'. 'Tis me solemn belief that there's a bottle of whisky under Steven Hickey's coat tails.'

'Arrah! what nonsense are you talking, man?' exclaimed Hickey indignantly.

'Thry his pockets,' said the fiddler.

'May the divil come for your sowl in three sthandin' leps, Tom Begley!' yelled Hickey, as he was being seized and searched by the men around him; but Tom's knowledge of the character and habits of his acquaintance was seldom at fault, and amidst great laughter the bottle was produced from the blacksmith's pocket.

'Now,' said Tom, after refreshing himself, 'tis comin''; and standing up on the turf stack and extending one arm towards his audience, he began :

'The thraitor's house is finely planned,
 You'd think till judgment day 'twould stand,
 But when you take a nearer view—
 Oh wirra sthruce ! Oh wirra sthruce !

How well the slater laid the roof !
 How illigant and waterproof !
 But every night the rain comes through,
 Oh wirra sthruce ! Oh wirra sthruce !

And thin the painting,—Och, 'tis grand !
 The finest paint in all the land ;
 Four coats itself ! But was there two ?
 Oh wirra sthruce ! Oh wirra sthruce !

And Heaven reward the plumber's skill——'

He hesitated and came to a standstill amid the cheers and exhortations of his audience. ' 'Tis goin' from me,' he said. 'Just give me another sup o' whisky while I col-lect me powers. Blood alive ! but there's a janius in that bottle. I have it agin, sure enough.

And Heaven reward the plumber's skill,
 He laid the dhRAIN pipes up a hill,
 "For there," says he, "'s the finest view,"
 Oh wirra sthruce ! Oh wirra sthruce !'

The last verse he delivered very solemnly :

'The thraitor's house is built, they say,
 To stand until the judgment day ;
 But, phaix, that judgment day is due.
 Oh wirra sthruce ! Oh wirra sthruce !

There !' said he, sitting down amidst loud applause. 'That's pothry and prophecy for you in one.'

Preparations were being made for a renewal of the dancing when a sudden silence fell upon the crowd, and Tom Begley perceiving it inquired what was happening.

‘’Tis Father Barry coming over to us—he have the news, sure enough,’ was the answer.

‘Well,’ said the priest, ‘what holiday’s this you’re keeping to-day?’

‘’Tis just waitin’ to hear the verdict we are, your riverence,’ one of them replied.

‘Any excuse is good enough for leaving your work, I’m thinking,’ said Father Barry. ‘What business have you here, Hickey, with my horse waiting down at the forge to be shod? ’Tis the last I’ll send you if the work’s not done this evening. And I’m surprised at you, Tom Begley, to be encouraging the people to waste their time like this. Is it ballet-girls we want in the country or good milk-maids? Faith, I don’t wonder we’re a poor country, and others going ahead of us, if we go to afternoon parties when we ought to be at work.’

‘Wisha! Don’t be too hard on us, your riverence,’ said Tom Begley.

‘’Tis bad news he have about the thrial, and it’s upset his temper,’ whispered another.

‘Mr. Desmond will be late to-night if he comes,’ said Father Barry, ‘and ’tis no use waiting to see him, but I have the news of the verdict from him.’ He paused a moment, and every eye in the crowd was instantly fixed on him. ‘It is “Not guilty.”’

Perhaps he expected that the announcement would be hailed by an outburst of applause, and he seemed moved by the absolute silence in which the news was received. The people seemed to wait for some comment or explanation from him, but he gave none.

‘’Tis home you’d better be going now. We must get about our work again and forget this trouble,’ was all he said.

He turned to go, but was arrested by the voice of the fiddler.

'One word, your riverence, before you lave us,' he said. '"Not guilty," is it? Will that mane that Costello didn't murther Rahilly, or that he did murther him and there was no guilt in doin' it?'

Father Barry hesitated. 'The law considers him innocent of the murder,' he answered.

'Will he come back among us? Will we spake to him as if he had no hand in it?' another asked.

'It might be better for him to leave the place,' the priest answered evasively.

'Indeed, then, 'twas Michael Desmond got him off and nothing else,' cried Hickey; 'and 'tis a great victory, glory be to God!'

'"Not guilty"! ' muttered Tom Begley, 'Jem Costello an innocent man! Begorra! Masther Michael's the man for Ireland.'

'He is,' said Father Barry, 'and we must all stand by him and help him in the good cause; but whoever was guilty of Rahilly's death was a poor friend to the old country, and 'tis best to forget it as soon as we can. Away home with you now, boys.'

They obeyed him without further question, though it was not homeward but to the village street and the public-house, where the great news could be fully discussed, that they went.

The old priest stood for a moment watching the departing throng. Something in the scene saddened him. By their silence he saw that they had instinctively condemned the verdict in their hearts, and yet by the stress of political circumstances, the outcome of past wrongs, they were bound to hail it as a victory. To him it was no victory, and the

prospects of the cause he had as much at heart as the keenest politician had seldom looked less bright to him than as he retraced his steps to the house.

Later in the evening Michael Desmond arrived at Mallow station, where his carriage had been sent to meet him. There had been a crowd on the lookout for him by an earlier train, but it had dispersed, and, much to his satisfaction, for he was in no mood for demonstrations, he managed to pass through the town and out into the quiet country unrecognised.

It was a night full of sweet odours and murmurs of the south-west wind, and across wide spaces of darkness the outlines of the distant mountains stood clear against the starlight. The scene brought refreshment to the spirit of the hard-worked politician, though it no longer stimulated his imagination or uplifted his heart as in the years before he had entered the fray. The old mystery of life, the magic of the unknown path, had passed from his footsteps, and his mind was engaged with the definite and the known—with that world which he had made for himself, that purpose in life which he was striving continually to achieve.

During the journey homeward he had hardly spoken, and his man, Thade Dorgan, who by his extreme reticence had won the approval of his master and a reputation in the neighbourhood for a knowledge of political secrets, knew Desmond too well, and respected himself too much, to speak of the verdict. At the Ballyvodra cross-roads he was recognised by some men, who, not noticing in the dusk that Desmond was the other occupant of the car, called on him to pull up, and began questioning him for the last news of the trial. The moment they

discovered their mistake they fell back in silence, and Dorgan drove on, well pleased at their discomfiture. A simple 'Good night!' was all the speech they had from Desmond, nor did they expect more: the most popular man in Ireland was also the least familiar in his intercourse with the people.

Though the evening was late, a considerable crowd still lingered in Duhallow, and Desmond, wishing to avoid any popular demonstration, dismounted from the car outside the village and took a footpath to the Castle. He passed through the empty courtyard, and round under the shadow of the old tower, to the front entrance. The darkness of one end of the building and the lights in the other marked the disused and the tenanted parts of the house; but a gleam of firelight on one of the windows of the tower showed that Desmond's room had been prepared for him. For a man of iron nerves and will he was curiously superstitious, and at times moved by unaccountable impulses. Now, as he was about to enter the house, one of those strange whispers of the imagination, or perhaps the intuitive consciousness of another presence, held him back. Turning, he saw, a few yards off, the figure of a woman with a shawl on her head, and in a moment recognised her as Mary Rahilly, the wife of the man who had been murdered. There was perhaps no one in the world whom he needed so much courage to meet. Years ago, when he was a reckless young man and she a comely girl, he had been her lover. Their secret had been unknown to the world, perhaps, he could not say, to her husband. He had been glad to hear of her marriage, and sent her a wedding present of money, which she had returned to him, and since then he had hardly seen or spoken to her. Few

things could have shown more strongly his determination not to be turned aside by any personal considerations in carrying out his political schemes than his resolve to undertake the defence of the man whom he was convinced had murdered her husband. It was necessary to his plan of action to do this, and when making his decision he counted on the possibility of her resentment. He had proposed to do something for her, to assist her to join some relations in America, or help her in some other way, and had dismissed a disquieting memory from his mind ; but he had not expected that she would come to him herself, and now that she stood before him in the shadow of the tower he needed all his self-possession. She was the first to speak.

‘It’s yourself, Michael Desmond,’ she said, in a low voice.

‘I’m sorry for you, Mary, in your trouble,’ he replied.

‘Sorry!’ she echoed, in a tone of scorn. ‘I wouldn’t doubt it.’

A window near them was opened and a sound of voices reached their ears.

‘Come to my room, Mary,’ said Desmond. ‘We shall not be disturbed there, and I must talk to you.’

He opened the door, and, after a moment’s hesitation, she followed him into the empty vaulted chamber and up the stone staircase of the tower. The gleam of the log fire in the grim old room gave them light enough to see each other’s faces clearly. They were both pale, but Desmond was self-possessed and the woman trembling with emotion. He was a man in whose whole appearance, in his commanding figure and handsome, resolute features,

power was written ; but he and the simple peasant woman met now on equal terms. They looked each other in the face ; there was no faltering on either side.

‘Will you sit down, Mary?’ he said, moving a chair towards her.

‘I will not, thank you kindly, sir,’ she replied, with native courtesy, while her eyes looked defiance. ‘I have little to say and I can say it standing.’

‘It is altogether a sad business,’ said he. ‘I am sincerely sorry for you and I will help you if you will allow me. My part in it had to be gone through. I am not my own master in some things.’

‘Michael Desmond,’ she said, ‘you defended the man that murdered my husband, and you forgot the ger’ll that was kind to you.’

It was the only allusion she made to their past relationship. He was apparently unmoved, but her words touched his heart.

‘I’m afther coming here to-night,’ she continued, ‘to ask you a question, and ’tis the truth I expect and know I’ll get from you.’

‘You’ll get the truth from me, Mary,’ he replied.

‘Was Costello innocent,’ she asked, ‘or did he murder my man? Did you believe yourself that he was innocent?’

She was deadly pale while she waited for his answer. Desmond hesitated a moment. The expedient reply, the lie to suit the circumstances, flashed to his mind, but he was compelled to tell the truth.

‘I believe your husband died by Costello’s hand,’ he said ; ‘but a jury of his countrymen did not call it murder. Remember he was turned out of his

home, and when Rahilly took it he knew his danger. Poor fellow! he made a mistake; I would not blame him; but he put himself on the side of the enemies of his country.'

It was enough; she had had his answer. If Desmond could have said that he defended the murderer believing him innocent, she would have pardoned him; as it was, she was filled with passionate resentment.

'May God remimber it agin you, Michael Desmond!' she said, in a low tone.

He made an attempt to soothe her. 'Forgive me, Mary!' he said. 'I had to forget my own feelings and think of the cause of our country.'

'And may God Almighty forget the cause of the country that needs the help of murtherers!' she went on, with growing passion. 'May sorrow come to your family, and may the people mock at your name! May the curse of God be on you, and may the curse o' the widow woman follow you to your grave!'

He was deeply affected. The deliberate curse is in Ireland a solemn thing, and the superstitious element in Desmond's nature made it of greater import. Coming, too, from the woman he had injured, it had a special significance, and for a moment he shrunk before her words; but his habitual self-command did not desert him.

'I asked you to forgive me,' he said. 'You have cursed me. I did you a wrong, and once more before we part I ask you to forgive it.'

'My curse is laid upon you,' she said, 'and may it follow you to the grave!'

Never on the most critical occasions of his political contests had his desire for victory been so keen as the anxiety he now felt to overcome the

enmity of this peasant woman. The fight with her seemed hopeless, but he did not abandon it. He exerted all his powers to influence her feelings.

'In cursing me you are cursing Ireland,' he said, in a sterner tone than he had used before.

'I am,' she replied. 'I have no country and no home.'

'I am accustomed to the hatred of the English. They would be glad to see all the misfortunes of your curse fall upon me. What do I care for their hatred or their curses? but from an Irish woman, and from you! for you to join them!'

She was silent.

'Ireland has done you a wrong, but you would not turn against Ireland. It was a madman who held the weapon that struck your poor husband: it was England that put it in his hand. Forgive me for defending him! By doing so you can show your love for Ireland as no other woman can.'

'I'm after hearing what I came to hear and spaking what I came to spake,' she replied.

'We are told to forgive as we hope to be forgiven. If Costello had been hanged it would not have helped you.'

She raised her eyes and looked him in the face.

'You stood by the man that murdered my husband, Michael Desmond,' she said. 'You turned agin the man that gave me a dacent name, and what was my name worth before?'

'I thought you had forgiven the wrong I did you long ago, Mary.'

'You know 'twas forgiven,' she said, 'with flashing eyes. 'The sin of it is on me soul, and God forgive me if I was proud of it when I should be ashamed; but 'tis ashamed I am now, now that I know well

that you have no more thought for me than if I was the meanest woman in the streets.'

'May I deserve your curse if ever I could think disrespectfully of you, Mary,' he said, 'or if ever I forget the girl who trusted me too well.'

She was unmoved by his pleading. All his powers of persuasion, his personal magnetism, which could sway thousands, were as weakness beside the elemental passion in a peasant woman's heart, born of the wrong which had shown her a world without justice or mercy.

'My curse is upon you, Michael Desmond,' she repeated. 'The curse of the murdered man's wife shall fall on the defender of murder, and the curse of the girl that loved you shall come between you and your love.'

She turned and went towards the door. Desmond remained motionless for a moment, and then followed her bearing a lamp, and stood watching her in silence as she went down the dark staircase and out into the night.

CHAPTER VII

LADY SHANDON'S BALL

HALF the county was dancing at Shandon House, and the amazing thing about it was that Desmond appeared among the guests. The suggestion that he should be invited was first made by Miss Temple-Cloud ; and Lord Shandon, after ascertaining that Sir Henry Desmond had no objection to meeting his relative, gladly assented to a proposal which accorded with his own aims as a promoter of political reconciliations. On further reflection, Sir Henry decided that a friendly meeting with Michael Desmond was to be desired. It was at the time when Irish questions were dominating English politics, and both the great English parties were considering the possibility of coming to some understanding with the Irish leader. The Prime Minister, indeed, was said to be in favour of some scheme of Home Rule, and it was known to a few that he was prepared to meet Desmond privately and discuss the whole situation with him. Sir Henry Desmond saw that it might be possible for him, perhaps helped by the relationship of his *fiancée* to the Prime Minister, to bring this meeting about, and he hinted to Corinna the wisdom of a friendly attitude—an unnecessary suggestion, as she was already sufficiently interested in his personality and attracted by his career to make her desire to

interest him in herself. The invitation to him had been her proposal, and she also furnished the explanation of his acceptance. The morning after he received it he had met her in the village. As they passed she looked at him and, to his surprise, bowed. He took off his hat and went on, almost startled by her beauty, and puzzled by her action. It was either a mistake—the involuntary movement which comes of suddenly seeing a face with which one is familiar ; or else—it would be the subtlest of flattery—her acknowledgment, as one of the public, of his position. Whatever the explanation, he was sufficiently attracted by her to take the opportunity offered of making her acquaintance.

For other reasons the thought of being present at Shandon House piqued his interest : it was in the nature of an adventure, an expedition into the enemy's country. Accustomed to the plaudits of the people and the deference of his associates, he looked forward to appearing among the hostile—among those people of the county, too, who during the recent generations of the fallen fortunes of his family had hardly treated the Desmonds as their social equals.

His mother expressed no surprise at his decision ; his father seemed troubled as to how he would meet Sir Henry Desmond. ' If the descendant of the rascal who disinherited us offers you his hand,' said he, as Michael was leaving the house, ' I wouldn't doubt a son of mine to know how to treat him.' He stood beside his wife, huge and slovenly, his great grizzled beard covering his chest, a remarkable contrast to the graceful and beautiful lady ; and having delivered himself of the only bit of counsel he had offered to Michael for many years, went back

to his arm-chair and his punch. He had some difficulty in following his son's career : he knew that he had become great, and was intensely proud of his achievement, without knowing or greatly caring how the result had been attained ; but the occasion of his being brought face to face with the representative of the execrated branch of the family roused his interest and awoke in his indolent soul some sleepy memories of hereditary hatred.

Desmond's presence at the ball surprised every one. By some it was resented, old Major Grove of Liscarrol carrying his protest against remaining as the fellow-guest of 'the leader of rebels and the defender of murderers,' as he expressed it, to the length of ordering his carriage, in spite of the protests of his three daughters. The general feeling, however, was of interest and curiosity, for during the last ten years Michael had been seen but little in his own county, and was personally a stranger to most of the people present.

A ball at Shandon House was worth going to. Good music, a good floor, and the best of suppers could be relied upon, and there were other attractions which no mother with daughters could afford to miss. The young men of the county who were worth attention and could afford to marry were few in number and were well known ; but at Shandon House men were to be met who did not belong to the neighbourhood, guests from England or other parts of the country, in addition to the inevitable contingent of officers from the barracks at Buttevant, and perhaps a draft from Fermoy. They were all here to-night, a merry company, ready to get all the fun that was going during the next few hours in dancing and love-making, or supping and gossip,

according to their time of life,—all united by the freemasonry of their class, a confraternity of good fellowship, outside which appeared one man, distinct, apart, and unsympathetic.

Desmond came late, and when he arrived his hostess had left her place in the hall and had joined the dancers. A waltz was just over, there was a murmur of voices, a rustle of dresses, and couples in search of quiet corners were leaving the ball-room as he appeared. As he passed along, looking at no one while every one looked at him, he was recognised immediately, and furnished a subject of conversation between all those who were not specially interested in each other. 'What on earth is he doing here?' 'What a fine-looking man!' 'How well he looks in evening dress!' 'Fancy Shandon asking him!' 'Fancy his accepting!' 'Will you dance with him if he asks you?' were some of the comments. Mrs. Spencer Boyle, seated on a sofa in the corridor leading to the drawing-room, was the first to claim acquaintance.

'Ah, Mr. Desmond,' said she, 'is this the way you're passing your old friends? and I've not seen you since we met at Ballyvodra after you saving Kitty O'Brien's life, though I hear enough about you—not that I believe the half of what they put on the papers. And to think of meetin' you here after all.'

'And am I too late to ask for a dance?' he inquired.

'Oh, indeed you are then, ten or twenty years too late, my dear man!' replied Mrs. Boyle. 'I'm just here to-night looking after a wild niece of Spincer's, and rememberin' the good old days when I wanted lookin' after meself.'

‘Always the way,’ said Desmond gallantly ; ‘the more charming they are the more looking after they want.’

He left her highly pleased at his remark, chuckling over memories of bygone naughtinesses. On his way to the drawing-room he passed the Miss O’Briens, who were seated on either side of the new Protestant curate, and the next moment he met Kathleen, on the arm of one of Lord Shandon’s English guests. It was a vexation to her that her colour defied control, but no prettier welcome could a man ask than the sudden blush which outleapt her words ; and this she now gave Desmond. They had opportunity for no more than a word of greeting, but as they passed she turned back and held up her card with inquiring eyebrows, by which he understood that she had kept a dance for him. He signalled his acknowledgment with the smile of an old comrade, and was conscious of a feeling of genuine pleasure in meeting her, and of certainty in having at least one ally among the ranks of the enemy. And it pleased him to be here : he had never been so conscious of the strength of his position as now, when he was surrounded by the men who had striven in vain to assail it.

Lady Shandon was in the drawing-room, the centre of a little group which disintegrated as Desmond approached to make his greetings. ‘Quite an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Desmond,’ she said, rather frigidly ; but her husband joining them at the moment was very cordial.

‘Very glad to see you, Desmond,’ said he. ‘And you’ll find the poor landlords trying to enjoy themselves in spite of you. We may be all pulling together yet.’

'You seem to forget that I'm one of them,' Desmond remarked. 'I look upon all Irish questions from the landlord's point of view.'

'The landlord's point of view? You!'

'From the dispossessed landlord's point of view,' he said, with a twinkle in his eye. 'But to-night,' he added, 'we are all one party.'

'Yes, of course, and like every good Irishman, with a houseful of girls and the fiddles going, you're dying to be dancing. As to partners? Oh, you know where to look? Well, when you're disengaged I want to introduce you to your English relatives, whom I suppose you know we have staying here. You have no objection to meet Sir Henry?' he asked, in an undertone.

'I am your guest, Lord Shandon,' replied Desmond, 'and shall be happy to meet any of your friends.'

He had made up his mind before he came that he could not refuse to meet Sir Henry, and, indeed, he was glad the occasion had arisen. It fell in with a definite object he had in view to be brought face to face, even behind the mask of conventional courtesies, with the man he meant to treat as an enemy.

He was in no hurry to find partners, and stood for a while at one of the doors of the ball-room watching the dancers, and wondering when Miss Temple-Cloud would appear among them.

'Not on circuit to-night, Mr. Desmond?' said the facetious Mr. Callaghan, Q.C., as he paused beside him for a minute's rest in his waltz.

'The juniors get the pick of the briefs at these assizes,' he replied. 'You don't admit it?' as the other shook his head. 'Well, 'tis odd to find our-

selves dancing with the daughters of the girls we used to dance with.'

It was long since he had looked on a similar scene. Its brightness, the rhythm of the music, the hum of voices and the ripple of laughter, the colour, the animation of the girls' faces, touched him with genial influences, and again he was glad he was there.

At last Miss Temple-Cloud came into the room on the arm of the Colonel of the regiment stationed at Buttevant, and Desmond's attitude of pleased acquiescence in the scene changed to active attention.

She was attired, with her usual perception of the demands of her own beauty, in a dress of pale gold, which made the dark loveliness of her hair and eyes the more manifest; and to Desmond she seemed to bring a radiance as of moonlight with her, and to throw a splendour on her surroundings, to confer the grace of her own movements on those near her. The Princess of the fairy tale had come and the whole scene was changed, needing only one improvement—that the part of the Prince had been his own instead of having fallen to his hereditary enemy. He remained where he was, watching her while the dance lasted, and as she passed him on leaving the room, he was honoured by a glance, instead of a bow this time, but, nevertheless, something like a recognition. He grew impatient for his introduction, and was engaged in some curious reflections when the voice of his host aroused him:

'Allow me, Mr. Desmond, to have the pleasure of making you acquainted with a member of your own family,' said Lord Shandon. 'Sir Henry Desmond.'

The Englishman nodded and smiled pleasantly. Michael bowed with marked formality. Neither of

them proffered his hand, nor made any allusion to that previous acquaintance with each other which the Speaker of the House of Commons had enabled them to acquire.

"*Nous revenons à nos moutons*," you see,' said Sir Henry.

'Yes,' Desmond replied, 'but not always to find them. Sometimes the wolf has been before us.'

'I admit, Mr. Desmond, that I am an absentee without excuse; but here I am at last.'

'And a very welcome prodigal,' said Lord Shandon, offering a genial remark to temper the coldness of Desmond's tone.

'The prodigal—of course he was a younger son,' said Desmond; 'or am I thinking of Jacob? I am afraid, Sir Henry, that we may have failed to do our part as to the fatted calf, but we are very poor over here.'

Sir Henry laughed: he did not perceive the sarcasm of Michael's reference to the relationship of the two branches of the family—indeed, the story of the wrong done in the past, which still lived in the hearts of those who had suffered by it, had been forgotten by those whom it had benefited. In Desmond's attitude there was no lack of external courtesy, and when they parted after a few conventional remarks, Sir Henry had no impression of having been met in a hostile spirit by the man he had reasons for wishing to meet on friendly terms.

The fiddles again called attention to the business of the moment. Michael was led through a quadrille by Miss Bridget O'Brien, and danced the waltz which followed with Major Boyle's wild niece. He had just relinquished that young lady to her next partner when he met Kathleen.

'Hullo! Kitty, my dear,' said he. 'Here's a chance at last.'

'Oh,' said Kathleen, 'and do you expect me to have a dance left for you at this time of night.'

'Indeed I do,' said he, 'and mean to have one, even if I have to fight a duel in consequence.'

'I was quite jealous of Aunt Bridget to be asked before me. Well, here's my programme.'

'En'thing left?' asked a languid-looking young gentleman from the barracks, addressing Kathleen in complete disregard of the fact that she was engaged in conversation. 'What! full up, eh! Sorry,' he said, as she shook her head and he sauntered on.

She noticed Desmond's look of amused contempt, and laughed gaily.

'It was unkind to refuse him,' he said. 'Remember he is accustomed to be petted. These are your defenders. They are sent over from England to protect you against your own countrymen.'

'Don't be sarcastic,' said Kathleen. 'If you want to dance, come along.'

Desmond grew merry in her company. If Miss Temple-Cloud's beauty suggested the summer night, Kathleen's charm was like that of a spring morning; and though they were of the same age, in the one the attraction of womanhood seemed to have found its complete expression, while in the other girlhood still lingered.

Kathleen was thoroughly enjoying the evening. She left her home cares behind her and was happy in the gaiety of her surroundings. She forgot the dulness of those partners who were good dancers like Mr. Castle, for instance, of the R.I.C., who hardly opened his lips, but steered her with consum-

mate skill through a rather crowded ball-room, and forgave the clumsiness of those who were pleasant companions. With Michael she found both the qualifications that she and all other girls liked—the good dancer and the pleasant comrade ; and if he had been neither the one nor the other, she would have been just as happy in his company, for he was her hero.

‘This is the first time I have seen you since the great meeting in Dublin,’ she said.

‘And I did not know you were there until afterwards. I was very proud when I heard of it.’

‘Oh, Connor arranged it,’ she said. ‘It was very exciting. I begin to understand the fascination of political life.’

‘The fighting ?’

‘Yes.’

‘Not the cause ?’

‘No, you forget that. I was almost on your side against my convictions at the meeting.’

‘We must believe in our cause,’ he said, ‘if we are to make a real fight of it. I wish you were altogether on my side.’

He was perhaps something more than a hero to her, otherwise how would this thought have entered her head : ‘If,’ the question came, ‘he asked it of you, could you desert the cause of your own people for his sake ?’ She found, too, that he was looking at her rather critically ; and, conscious of one of her obtrusive blushes, she said the first thing that came into her head.

‘Fancy talking politics here, and fancy your being here at all ! Every one has been making remarks about it and wondering what it means. Some of the ladies have been forbidden to dance with you.’

'Tell me one of them,' he laughed, 'and I'll get Lord Shandon to give me an introduction.'

'Mrs. Major Freeman. Miss Ruberry, the Bishop's daughter,' she whispered.

'What do you bet against my chances, Kitty?' he said, 'and how you'll laugh at me if I'm defeated. Well, I mean to try; and if I win——'

Old Dr. Riordan, the plain-spoken friend of every one in the district, interrupted. 'Did ye ever hear tell of the Lancers, my dear?' he said.

'Oh, Dr. Riordan!' she exclaimed, glancing at her programme, 'do they come now? I've been looking forward to our dance.'

'I wouldn't doubt it,' he grinned, 'with all these young fellows to pick from. Upon my soul, Desmond, it reminds me of the Millennium to see you here.'

'Isn't that the time when the British lion will be found playing on an Irish harp?' Desmond asked.

''Twas the captivity of a very troublesome member of society I was thinking of, sir.'

'Indeed, doctor,' laughed Desmond, 'I'm glad 'tis the Millennium you're thinking of for a change and not the Dance of Death, and that it's only in quadrilles you're looking for your victims.'

'And this,' cried the doctor, enjoying the encounter, 'from the fellow I pulled through the measles when he was a boy! You're on my conscience, Desmond; for many's the time I thought what a grand thing it would have been for the country if I'd let you die. Come along with me, Kitty, away from the ungrateful villain.'

Desmond's appearance at the ball produced, as we have seen, a genuine resentment on the part of some of Lord Shandon's guests, and provided conversation

for others. His presence gave the occasion a peculiar interest : he was under constant notice ; people who were bitterly hostile to him were nevertheless glad of the opportunity of observing him ; others, merely curious, who were studious when near him to appear occupied with their own companions, quietly marked his movements. Never since he became a celebrity had his neighbours met him at a social function ; never were they likely to do so again. It was strange that he should be there, especially at a time when Sir Henry Desmond, a supposed opponent of his policy, was Lord Shandon's guest ; but the most surprising thing of all was the obvious cordiality, the friendly alliance between him and the lady who might have been expected to look coldly on him—the beautiful Miss Temple-Cloud. She also had been under close scrutiny. Her beauty not only won admiration but seemed to claim homage, and there was something of stateliness in her air which made one or two honest young fellows privileged to be her partners, whose subjects of conversation were chiefly equine, wonder what the devil they were going to talk to her about. They were at no loss when the time came, for she had the woman of the world's art of interesting her companions in themselves ; and all who made her acquaintance at the ball were agreed about her charm of manner. There was a difference, however, in her demeanour when she met Desmond : a new animation lighted her face and the conventional passed from her tone.

The change in both was like that in people who from having been spectators become performers ; as when the musician takes up his instrument, or the fencer faces his opponent. In thrust and parry, in feint and counter of glance and speech, they engaged

at the outset, avoiding the lagging steps towards comradeship, and while aiming at ascendancy, establishing a mutual understanding of equality.

'If,' she said, 'Ireland would but accept England as a woman accepts her partner in a dance. I don't lose my independence because I make you my pilot.'

'But what if your partner were a stout elderly gentleman who was thinking of his supper and not of his companion?'

'And what if he were a lover who had offended her and asked for forgiveness?'

'Or one who had been unfaithful in the past and will be so again in the future?'

'But isn't Ireland always unreasonable?' she asked. 'If she got a separation to-day, wouldn't she be asking to-morrow for a restitution of conjugal rights?'

Desmond laughed. 'Conjugal rights when there is no love?' he questioned.

'Really, I am not unsympathetic,' she said. 'I too have seen Ireland as a woman striving to be free.'

'And what d'ye think they were talking about within two minutes of being introduced?' said Dr. Riordan afterwards, in the smoking-room, to old Billy Wrixon of Castle Wrixon.

'Maybe 'twould be the Horse Show,' suggested Billy.

'The Horse Show, indeed!' exclaimed the doctor. 'No, sir, but love—love and conjugal rights; and to see them dancing together and looking at each other you'd think 'twas in training they were for the parts.'

Later in the evening Desmond had the privilege

of taking Miss Temple-Cloud in to supper with the prospect of another dance to follow. Lord Shandon marked the good fellowship with satisfaction, Sir Henry with amusement. During the three months of their engagement he had discerned that Corinna was a very clever young lady and likely to be of great use to him in his political career : it looked now as though she were preparing the way for the negotiations he had in view.

An admirable supper crowned a successful ball.

'I look upon it as the hall-mark of hospitality to give good wine at a dance. At dinner, of course, you expect it,' Desmond observed to Corinna.

He found her the exception among women in her artistic appreciation of good wine.

'But, after all,' she said, in excuse for the hosts on such occasions, 'a man owes a duty to his cellar.'

'Yes,' he agreed, 'ladies seldom know the difference, and half these youngsters, even the soldier boys with the *blaze* countenance, have hardly outgrown their taste for ginger-beer.'

'I suppose it is the same with everything in life,' she said. 'When you are young all the wine is pleasant, all the dreams are true, all the girls are charming. As we get older we learn what to avoid, I suppose; but it leaves us very little. If, for instance, a man's knowledge of women goes on increasing like his knowledge of vintages, he must find it a very difficult thing to choose a wife when he is forty.'

'And perhaps equally difficult to win her,' said Desmond. 'Do you know the lines—

We spend our lives in learning pilotage,
And grow good steersmen when the vessel's crank ?'

‘*Pour moi,*’ she said, ‘I think there should never be less than ten—and even twenty years does not matter—between a man and his wife.’

Desmond recollected that this was about the difference between her age and Sir Henry’s, and assumed that this was in her thoughts. The interval between her and himself was little less, and the remark was not unwelcome.

At another part of the table Horace Croker was attending to the wants of Mrs. Major Boyle and listening rather abstractedly to her conversation. His eyes went constantly in the direction of Kathleen O’Brien, who was apparently on the best of terms with her companion, Mr. Stoney Atkins of Mount Atkins, a merry fellow without a penny.

‘And I’ll bet you the pick of my horses to a bunch of forget-me-nots out of your garden that you’re married before me,’ said he, in a voice loud enough to be heard half down the table. ‘And, what’s more, Miss Kathleen, if you’re not married before you’re thirty I’ll marry you myself.’ Kathleen laughed with Mr. Atkins, but she was not merry. She was even quicker than other observers to notice the interest which Michael Desmond and Miss Temple-Cloud took in one another. She could hardly help envying the assured ease and confidence of the young woman of the world, and felt that she herself must appear provincial in comparison. She had been looking forward eagerly to her next dance with Michael; now she almost feared it, lest he should find her dull after his brilliant companion.

When a man and woman are mutually attracted, the speed by which intimacy advances is generally decided by the woman; and now, between Desmond and Miss Temple-Cloud, it was she who made the

signal. They approached each other deliberately : she intent on exercising the power of her sex on a man notably intractable ; he stimulated by the possibility of establishing an understanding with the beautiful woman who belonged to the camp of the enemy. She exerted herself to attract ; he, like one sure of his seamanship who spreads the sail of his boat to the full force of the wind, welcomed the encounter.

They were to dance again after supper, but as they left the table she offered a pleasant alternative.

‘I’d much rather go on with our conversation,’ she said. ‘And let me take you into my confidence : I want a cigarette. Couldn’t you make it possible ?’

They found the library empty but open to intrusion, and Desmond boldly suggested the moonlit terrace on which the windows opened—a proposal which he promptly followed up by appropriating a cloak from the hall and placing it over her shoulders. The cigarette was forgotten by both of them.

The step across the threshold from the gaiety of thronged and lighted rooms into the serious splendour of the silent night marked a change in the relationship of Desmond and Corinna. The scene and their consciousness of being alone together touched their imaginations similarly : to both of them the many steps between first acquaintance and intimacy seemed already taken. The full moon was in the south, and all the sky was glorious with slowly-moving clouds ; the south-west wind that bore them aloft, and whispered below among the woods, breathed through the upland fields the softness of far-distant seas. To the west of the house the terrace ran for some distance above a little gorge, through which the Alloa flowed almost hidden in trees, and ended

in a parapet built on a projecting rock, from which the house was hidden and a reach of the river came into sight. This now shone bright in the moonlight between its dark wooded banks, and after breaking into silver rapids farther down disappeared, a wandering music, in the glen.

'To-night I could almost believe with your peasantry in the fairies,' said Corinna. 'I wish I could. All the mystery of the world is going.'

'Or only changing,' he suggested. 'We evict the wonder from one dwelling, but it always finds another.'

'Oh, I don't think so,' she said. 'What have we in place of the fairies, for instance?'

'People,' he replied.

'People? Why, they get more conventional every day.'

'Only superficially. I believe cultivation is making human nature always more complex and interesting. We are like unexplored countries to each other. If, for instance, I had the old faiths and could believe in fairies you would probably be nothing more to me than a very charming young lady. Now, if I may say it without indiscretion, you are yourself the wonderland, full of unknown paths.'

'But how often do people approach each other in this spirit?' she laughed, thinking of one or two other partners she had danced with that evening. 'And, after all, does not this mystery which may seem to surround another person's life come of our want of knowledge? The moonlight makes everything look mysterious; the sunlight will take it all away. You were very complimentary about my unknown world, but that was simply because you don't know

me. In the half light we picture all sorts of things which have no existence.'

'And in some cases,' said Desmond, 'might not the daylight reveal an even more beautiful scene than the moonlight suggests?'

'Oh, it might,' she answered. 'The dull man who does not make pictures for himself might find more than he expected, but not often the man with imagination. But really I think women are more apt to deceive themselves about men than men are about us. Have you ever by chance read a girl's letter to a friend after she has become engaged to be married?'

'No,' he laughed, amused at her cynicism, 'but I have met boys who were in love.'

'Boys do not get married nowadays, Mr. Desmond. It is the men with experience who marry the girls who have none.'

She spread her cloak on the low parapet of the terrace and sat down, ridiculing Desmond's fear that she might find the night air cold. With the moonlight shining on the pale gold of her dress and the whiteness of her bare neck, she looked to him more than ever like the princess of a fairy story. He told her so.

'Yes,' she said, 'we still go on adorning ourselves, though men have given up taking thought of such things. It is to attract men we do it. It is a humiliating admission, but our physical attractions, our sex, remain after all our only real strength. We have to make the most of them.'

'But why should it be humiliating?'

'Because we are not thinking of what is best in ourselves, but what is weakest in men. They don't want goodness—they want comeliness, and we know

it is more important to be well dressed than well read. Men may follow their highest aspirations. You may devote yourselves to the service of art or science or your country and win our admiration at the same time, but without giving a thought about making yourselves attractive to us.'

'But suppose a woman's personal charm is her greatest strength,' he replied, 'why should she think it humiliating to make the most of it?'

'Oh,' she said impatiently, 'I hoped you might have understood me. Imagine, for instance, that a man had habitually to exhibit his abilities before women, to parade his courage or his scholarship to attract them.'

'I am afraid he often does so.'

'No, not the best of you ; you keep these things in the background. We are educated to exhibit that side of ourselves which experience has taught us men most care for, and it is not our best.'

'But is it not the best?' he asked. 'What is there better? In a sordid, commonplace world what is so priceless as that beauty which women keep always fresh in our midst? And think of the influence it gives her.'

'Now, forgive me for being personal, Mr. Desmond, but has her influence ever affected your views or your work in the slightest degree?'

'Well,' he said simply, 'I fancy that anything I have achieved is due chiefly to the influence of my mother.'

'Influence,' she repeated meditatively ; 'yes, I suppose we must be content with that. But how I should like to meet your mother ! Of course I shall, though. We shall be neighbours.'

'I hope it may be possible,' said Desmond, 'but

she has never visited any of her neighbours. She holds very strong political views.'

'And would regard me as one of the enemy? Well, I have a confidence to make to you: I am on your side. I am a Home Ruler.'

'A Home Ruler!' he exclaimed. 'And you will be the wife of Sir Henry Desmond.'

'Yes. You see I do not carry out my theory of a woman's dependence. I demand my freedom of thought. But it is not a study of politics, it is thinking about the position of woman that brought me to my conclusions. You will see that this is a question which I am interested in.'

'I share your interest, Miss Temple-Cloud.'

'Well,' she said, 'we are your Irish question. We stand in the same relationship to men as Ireland does to England. You have taken advantage of our weakness in the past as England has done with Ireland. You have overcome but never conquered us. You have alternately wooed and ill-treated. You have made penal laws for us which do not apply to men. Indeed they are in force still. Morally, woman is condemned for conduct that is condoned in a man. I am on your side, Mr. Desmond, when you are striving for the freedom of your country. Are you on my side when I claim the same liberty for women?'

'I wish I could say "Yes,"' he answered; 'it sounds so fair a bargain; but I am afraid I cannot. There must be different moral standards for men and women—though for the exceptional women, those who can think for themselves, the case may be different. But how few there are.'

'That is as though I should say that Home Rule would be quite safe and satisfactory if all the people

of Ireland had the views of the educated minority, and that at present it must be opposed.'

'We shall not get Home Rule unless we are strong enough to insist on it,' he answered, interested at finding her so skilful an opponent in argument. 'And women? Are they strong enough to insist?'

'And if you are not strong enough to get Home Rule what happens?' she persisted. 'Discontent, smothered rebellion, a hundred mean acts. It is the same with women. When they cannot rebel openly at injustice they find secret ways of revenge. You of all men, Mr. Desmond, you who have done more than any man for the freedom of your country, ought to be on our side.'

'At least you have shown me a new point of view,' he answered. 'Though I am not a young man, it seems I may still have a good deal to learn about women.'

'Perhaps true knowledge may come with marriage,' she suggested. 'We may obtain it by marrying, just as a nation learns geography by going to war.'

He laughed appreciatively. Her cynicism, real or assumed, puzzled and amused him. 'What a critic,' he thought, 'for a man to have of his daily conduct, and yet what an ally if her sympathies were with him.'

'I don't know how many dances we have missed or what our partners will think, Mr. Desmond,' said Corinna, 'but delightful as it is out here we must go back. Really I never saw such a lovely night.'

She rose and Desmond placed the cloak round her shoulders, feeling as he did so, though the touch was almost imperceptible, a thrill of pleasure in her nearness.

'I have enjoyed our conversation,' she said, as they walked back to the house, 'and shall look forward to another. You see you have found an unexpected political ally. I hope you are pleased.'

'Pleased! I am very proud of it,' said he, 'and yet I am filled with discontent.'

'And why?' she asked.

'That you nevertheless belong to the other side,' he answered. 'If we had not your sympathy I should not be thinking of how much more we might have had.'

There was a sound of wheels on the drive. Guests were already leaving. As Desmond and Corinna entered the house Horace Croker was escorting the Miss O'Briens and Kathleen to their carriage. Kathleen had eagerly looked forward to the dance which Michael had asked for, and as he did not appear to claim it, had managed to keep herself disengaged during another in the hope of his coming. She caught a glimpse of him now as he passed with Miss Temple-Cloud, and was so silent during the drive home that her aunts, who were in high spirits and full of reminiscences of the ball and the conversation of their partners, found her quite a dull companion.

CHAPTER VIII

SOME PREPARATIONS FOR MARRIAGE

THOUGH Parliament was not sitting and it was the time when politicians were resting after their labours, Michael Desmond was more than usually active. To encourage the discontent throughout the country and then to organise that discontent was his aim. The defence of Costello and the acquittal of the murderer was followed by agrarian crimes in other districts, and these he made the text for further denunciations of the Government in a series of speeches which he delivered during the month of August. The Irish newspapers applauded, the English condemned him more vehemently than ever. It was said that the Chief Secretary had counselled his re-imprisonment and had threatened to resign if his recommendation were not accepted ; it was also rumoured that the Government were alarmed at the dimensions which the disaffection had assumed, and were prepared to enter into negotiations with the Irish leader. This surmise was correct, though at the time even members of the Cabinet did not know that a conference had been arranged between Desmond and the Prime Minister.

It was a meeting which perhaps only a woman,

only one woman in ten thousand, could have brought about, and when Corinna Temple-Cloud, acting in the double capacity of niece and impromptu hostess in Sir Henry Desmond's house in Ennismore Gardens, retired from the drawing-room leaving the two statesmen together, she had good reason to feel satisfied with the part she had played. It had been necessary for her to practise those feminine arts which she had considered humiliating to her sex, and they had succeeded.

The venerable Prime Minister was the one man in the House of Commons for whom Desmond had shown personal respect, and this even in the heat of debate. He was the one man who was a match for him in parliamentary tactics, the only one under whose burning words of denunciation he had found it difficult to sit with his wonted indifference. The Prime Minister in turn had watched with peculiar interest the career of the intrepid young Irish leader who had drilled his subordinates to a perfection of discipline unseen before in party history, and who never wavered in pursuit of the object he had in view. The meeting was conducted with dignity on both sides and was not uncordial. It was simpler for Desmond than for his opponent : he knew what he wanted, he had an undivided national party behind him, whereas the other had the doubtful public opinion of England to reckon with. When the result of the negotiations which followed the meeting became known, it was said by his political opponents that the great statesman had sold himself to the Irish leader for eighty or ninety votes—enough to maintain his party in power ; but those who knew him best, members of his own following, some of these not too friendly to an Irish

alliance, were satisfied that he approached the question of Irish self-government with strong personal sympathy, and that Desmond had converted this into conviction. However that may have been the result was the same, and in due course the preliminary outlines of a Home Rule Bill were drafted.

Corinna had done her part and had won an immediate reward for her service. Her illustrious relative took a personal interest in her coming marriage, and listened with amusement to her pathetically humorous description of an imaginary wedding breakfast to be given to Sir Henry's fashionable friends at her mother's little house at Wyck St. Mary. Of course it had been settled that the wedding should be almost private; but her hint succeeded, and the Prime Minister's proposal that she should be married from his own house in Kent was exactly what she had aimed at. A date in October, about two months distant, was fixed for the wedding, and she promised herself a pleasant interval in shopping at her future husband's expense. 'You know how poor we are,' she said to him, 'and of course you will have to pay all my bills'; and not only did he welcome the privilege, but showed himself a very generous lover in his gifts of jewellery and the making of liberal marriage settlements. On the latter subject he even took her into his confidence and gave her an opportunity of expressing a somewhat singular wish. She mentioned the fancy she had taken to Ireland, the pleasure it would give her to find that she had a personal interest in the Duhallow Court property, with the result that the suggestion found practical embodiment in a legal document.

Sir Henry was indeed ready to accede to any reasonable request from his *fiancée*. Every day she attracted him more. He was in love with her after the manner of men of the world whose affections are reached through their senses. He was a connoisseur of women as he was of wine and many of the good things which colour the lives of the English gentleman of position. The sound critical judgment in all matters of taste comes only of experience. The mere vinousness of the wine, the mere sex of the girl, may be fascination enough for the young man ; but the middle-aged asks the subtler charm, and this Sir Henry had found unmistakably in Corinna. He looked forward with complete satisfaction to the new life he was about to enter on, and back with complacency on the life he had left behind. He had had his adventures, his experiences, his liberties as a bachelor ; and now with all this to the good he started the new life of the serener pleasures, the virtuous domestic life, with which so many men have to be content for their whole experience of love. And with what a mate too ! She would have been captivating enough to induce a man to give up the other solaces, even if these had not begun to be less attractive than formerly. Where, however, as with Sir Henry Desmond, reformation needed no exercise of moral effort, it often demands an exercise of practical business qualities. There are dissolutions of partnership involving financial arrangements which accompany domestic as well as commercial relationships, and such a liquidation was now necessary in the case of an establishment presided over by a lady—an establishment in which Sir Henry was, if not the sole proprietor as he imagined, at least the principal shareholder. He

did not wish to begin his new life with any fetters of the past about him, and he set himself to the duty of coming to a final understanding and making a complete break with the lady in question. The establishment had at this time been removed to Paris, and thither he proposed to go directly Corinna left London after the completion of her shopping and the purchase of furniture for Duhallow Court.

Gentlemen of mature experience about to marry young ladies may be in the habit of wondering whether their brides have any suspicion that there may have been episodes in their lives which it were better not to inquire about, or whether the dear innocents regard them as lovers shy or over-critical, who have hitherto failed to find the woman who could win their devotion. It is the latter part they play as a rule, but Sir Henry Desmond read Corinna too well to imagine that she deceived herself on the subject. He assumed that she took it for granted that there were indiscretions which a man must forget and a reasonable woman ignore, and he was therefore somewhat disconcerted when he found himself frankly interrogated.

The information which led her to approach such a delicate matter came to her from an unexpected quarter. Major Temple-Cloud could hardly have expected his daughter to ask his consent before accepting an offer of marriage. His reputation, it has been mentioned, was a bad one; his modes of life did little credit to his family; and never since her childhood had he attempted to control or advise his daughter, whom he secretly feared. Perhaps it was mortification at finding himself entirely ignored in the matter of her marriage, perhaps morbid exercise of a disused conscience that suddenly set him think-

ing of his paternal obligations. He adopted a lofty tone, and told Corinna that he felt it his sacred duty to let her know the reputation which Sir Henry Desmond bore.

‘The usual story of youthful wildness, I suppose?’ she said, with an apparent indifference which exasperated him.

‘Exactly,’ said he sarcastically. ‘In the eyes of the world and sensible young women these things are winked at. You are your own mistress. As to youthful wildness—well, it is a good long time since he was a young man, but his association with Miss Bell, the actress, a pretty enough woman but a damn bad actress, by the way, is not very ancient history. You need not let it disturb you, but, as your father, I felt it my duty to give you the information.’

Corinna was more disturbed than she had allowed her father to see, but she was not a girl to brood sentimentally or tolerate a relationship in which there could not be a bond of confidence and frank comradeship. She speedily gave Sir Henry an opportunity of trusting to her generosity. They were back at Wyck St. Mary, and he was walking home with her to her father’s cottage after service on Sunday morning when she approached the subject forbidden to young ladies.

‘I think, Henry,’ she said, coming straight to the point, ‘that we ought to make up our minds to trust each other thoroughly, and have no secrets from each other.’

‘My dear Corinna!’ he replied, in an alarmed tone. ‘Of course, why should you suggest such a thing?’

‘I never quite understand why a man should be

allowed to keep his secrets and a woman should be supposed to have none,' she said ; 'but that seems to be the accepted position. What I mean is, that wouldn't it be better for a man to take a girl he is going to marry into his confidence. It would prevent misunderstanding if she heard things she did not like afterwards, and unless she was a foolish creature he would not have anything to fear from his trust in her.'

'I am afraid some one has been annoying you with idle gossip,' he said, in a tone of marked vexation.

'Then may I take it that there is nothing I should ever be likely to hear which I would rather hear from yourself? I know that girls are supposed to know nothing at all about such things, but indeed, Henry, my only object is the wish to be your best friend.'

'My dear girl,' said Sir Henry, 'there is nothing that should bother you for an instant, and there is nothing really that I could tell you. I never supposed you were a girl who imagined that men were all saints ; and in my case, as in most others, I suppose, I must confess that I have sown some wild oats. Young men, you know, have temptations.'

'Ah yes ! long ago.'

'Yes, long ago. Thoughtless escapades, not much regretted at the time, and perhaps not likely to have been regretted at all if I had not known you. To have known you then would have made them impossible.'

She was not entirely satisfied, but she felt it would be an impertinence to question him further. She had had to make an effort to approach the subject at all, she had given him a great opportunity of taking her thoroughly into his confidence if he had anything to disclose, and she felt bound to accept his answer.

Though anxious that the bond between them should be as true a one as they could make it, she was not in love with him, and this perhaps made her readier to accept his generalities than she might have been otherwise.

‘All right,’ she said, turning to him with a very charming smile, ‘then we need never speak about it again.’ She changed the subject and spoke of the date of their marriage and the selection of bridesmaids which had just been made, and before they parted she mentioned a plan she had in view of going over to Ireland with her mother for a week or two to superintend personally the disposal of the furniture and other little details in connection with the preparation of Duhallow Court.

The proposal was a particularly welcome one to Sir Henry, who was anxious to get his visit to Paris over, and was glad that Corinna should be out of the way of putting questions or feeling surprise at the reason of his going. His present interview had made him feel the desirability of losing no time in freeing himself finally from the bonds of the past; and not only did he recognise the expediency of doing this, but the sight of the proud and beautiful girl made him conscious of a virtuous desire to appear at her side at the altar as became a Christian gentleman.

CHAPTER IX

A COUNCIL OF WAR

SOME English readers may not be aware that a tenant's application to the Irish Land Court for a reduction of rent cannot be heard until his arrears are paid. Mr. O'Brien's tenants preferred the evil of submitting to what they considered exorbitant rents and not paying them, to the alternative of paying what was due and appealing for fairer terms. Some of them were years behind; and the only measure which it was possible for the landlord to take against them, eviction, meant vacant farms—for the holdings of the dispossessed were forbidden fruit—and no rent at all. That part of Mr. O'Brien's property which remained in his own occupation was badly farmed, chiefly from lack of capital, and the whole estate was heavily mortgaged. This was the position of affairs which Kathleen had faced and set herself to remedy. It was mainly due to her personal efforts that the arrears of rent were not greater. When her father and a land-agent had failed, she had gone round herself to the tenants, some of them remote on the mountain slopes, and had returned with something at least to the good. She received a royal welcome on these circuits, and her popularity was not diminished by her plain

speaking, for she was very candid in expressing her opinion of the conduct of any man whom she believed to be able to pay more than he offered. Such rents, however, were a precarious asset, and the time came when they were insufficient, with the profit of the home-farm lands added, to pay the interest on the mortgages, not to speak of such minor obligations as an overdraft at the bank, the jointures due to the Miss O'Briens, and the expenses of education.

Mr. O'Brien tried to shut his eyes to the impending catastrophe. While prophesying more vehemently than ever the ruin of the landlords and of the whole country, he seemed to cherish a hope that somehow his own affairs would come right, and no doubt his religious faith helped to cheer him. Finally, Kathleen had to fight against his hopefulness, which seemed likely to last until he was actually turned out of his house, and when the time came for her to bring forward the plan which she had conceived for postponing or averting the family ruin she foresaw opposition.

About this scheme, and the means of getting possession of a sum of £2500 which had been left to her by her grandmother, she had gone to Dublin to see her legal adviser, and though her plans involved the possible loss of her little fortune, she had succeeded in winning the lawyer to her views. There was a risk, but what was the alternative? Nothing short of complete ruin and the break-up of the old home. The task of submitting to her father and brothers certain proposals which involved a humiliation of the family pride was not a pleasant one: the realisation of what they involved had already cost her own pride more than any one was likely to know;

but having once made up her mind, and seen her object clearly, she set cheerfully, if with some feigned light-heartedness, about her work.

She chose the evening of a day when her father had received notice of impending legal action on the part of one of the mortgagees for the disclosure of her plans to the family. In the afternoon she had had a preliminary talk with her brother Jack, and had left him gloomy, startled, and undecided. He was now about twenty-two, a tall, fine-looking lad, blue-eyed and fresh-coloured like his father. As the eldest son and ostensible heir to the property he had remained at home and had taken some share in the desultory farming operations at Ballyvodra, an occupation which allowed him ample time to hunt a couple of days a week in the season and play a good deal of cricket in the summer. Jem, the second boy, was, to his great disgust, by his sister's machinations, placed in a bank at Mallow, and Dan was still at school. Mr. O'Toole and Miss Green, who had formerly superintended the education of the family, were married and kept a kindergarten at Passage.

The efforts of Kathleen to keep up appearances at Ballyvodra had at last ended in failure. She and her aunts still dressed for dinner, but she had abandoned the attempt to make her brothers do so, and as often as not they appeared for the evening in their attire of the day. Carmody, the butler, still wore an old swallow-tailed coat; and after dinner when the ladies rose the men did so also, and one of the boys, perhaps wearing riding-breeches and carpet slippers, would open the door. But in spite of her degenerate surroundings Kathleen never grew casual, never failed to come before her family as thoughtful of her attire as if she were in the presence of strangers. They

chaffed her, they called her 'my lady Doo-Daw,' after a mythological enchantress of local fame, but she nevertheless compelled from them an admiration which helped to make her influence with them secure.

Dinner was over, and Miss Bridget was about to leave the table when Kathleen gave her a signal to remain.

'I think we ought to hold a council of war to-night,' she said. 'We have bad news. We must make up our minds what we are going to do. Don't you think so, father?'

'What's the good of talking?' said the old man impatiently. 'All the talk in the world won't make things any better, and 'tis the workhouse we have before us.'

'William!' exclaimed Miss Bridget.

'Don't you think Dan might leave the room?' said Miss Honora.

'Will I go, sir?' asked Dan.

'Sure, we might want his advice,' said Jem sarcastically.

'In the first place,' said Kathleen, 'I have a bit of good news. Connor Desmond has written to say he has a friend with a large ranche in Canada who is staying with him, and he can get him to take one of you back with him. It is a splendid opening.'

They all began talking at once, the younger boys becoming rival claimants: Dan pointing out that Jem was already on the road to success as a banker, and Jem bidding him be silent and remember his youth and the fact that his education was incomplete.

'I think,' said Kathleen, 'that Jem should have first claim, but we must leave it to Connor to say.'

'Indeed, then,' said Dan, disgusted at her support of Jem, 'I know which of us Connor'd take if he had to choose.'

'Which?' asked Miss Honora.

'Kitty herself,' replied Dan. 'Wasn't he always round the place when he thought she——'

'Out of the room with you, sir!' shouted Mr. O'Brien. 'There's no worse manners than buffooning with a lady's name even if she has the misfortune to be your sister. Off you go! And wait, sir! Just run over and tell Robert Owen that a butcher's coming from Cork in the morning to look at the bullocks we didn't sell at Cahirmee. I don't like it, Kathleen,' he continued, when Dan had retired. 'I don't like favours from that quarter. I don't forget my debt to Michael Desmond in saving your life, but I don't want to add to it. Hasn't he done more than any one in the world to ruin us? Haven't the tenants his orders? They'd pay if they were let alone. 'Tis not to that family we should go for favours, poor though we are.'

She could not but sympathise with her father's feelings, and she was glad to remember that no report of her presence at the meeting in Dublin had come to his ears.

'Connor takes no part in politics,' she remarked.

'They're all tarred with the same brush. 'Tis in their blood. They're rebels and papists. The gospel of robbery is what they're preaching to the people. Priests and agitators, they're hand and glove to turn us out of the country. They'd set up the Inquisition if they could. Their hearts are as black——'

'"Judge not, that ye be not judged,"' interrupted Miss Bridget, who on certain occasions when her

brother seemed untrue to his Christian principles ventured with success on reproof which she would not have dared to administer at other times. To-night, however, Mr. O'Brien was not disposed to self-examination, and she failed to achieve her momentary triumph.

"Judge righteous judgment," he thundered. 'We're not told to tolerate the works of the devil, or hold out the hand of brotherhood to meet a cloven hoof. A cloven hoof, I say—and that's what England has been doing until they did not like the feel of it, and then they shut Desmond up in prison, and then they got frightened, and out comes my gentleman again, and all the blackguards of men and fools of women in Ireland gathered at Dublin to make a hero of him; and the tenants reading it on the papers and laughing with their rents in their pockets, and the owners of those rents and the loyal subjects of the Queen on the way to the workhouse. Smile away, my ladies, if you think 'tis a good joke, but ye'll find 'tis a poor one before long. The time's come for the O'Briens to say good-bye to Ballyvodra.' The old man broke down at the end of this tirade. 'Ask Kathleen if you doubt it,' he added hopelessly.

Carmody brought lamps into the room and closed the shutters. He noted the unusual occurrence of the family sitting in conclave after dinner, and reported it to Mrs. Irwin.

'She's a great schamer,' he said, referring to Kathleen. 'There's new trouble, 'tis in their faces; but with the help o' God she'll be a match for it.'

She found it a little difficult to begin. 'I saw Mr. Boyd in Dublin,' she said. 'It is quite clear we can't go on much longer as we are—next March at the

latest — unless we carry out a plan I have. It is not——'

'No, nor till March,' interrupted her father. 'Where's the September interest to come from, and what did these lawyers say in the letter I have this morning? And the bank——'

'We can manage that,' she replied. 'I can pay the September interest out of my own money.'

'Is it the bit your grandmother left you?' exclaimed Mr. O'Brien. 'Not a penny of it will I have touched. You'll be wanting it soon enough, my poor girl.'

'No, I'm damned if we'll agree to that,' cried Jack; and his father appeared not to have heard the unmannerly language, and his aunts for once forbore to look shocked.

'Well, wait till I've told you my plan,' said Kathleen. 'It is not a pleasant one, but it's better than being turned out.'

'Faith, I don't know that it is,' said Jack.

'My dear, you are very mysterious,' said Miss Bridget.

'Oh,' Kathleen flung out desperately, 'twill make you laugh, and others may laugh at us, but that's better than being pitied. I want to turn the place into a hotel.' She saw blank and amazed faces, but hurried on without waiting for comment. 'Others have done it, people placed like ourselves. In Scotland I heard of a case where they were almost broken, and now they're saving, actually saving, money. That was a golf hotel, but we have fishing and rough shooting and the best hunting in the south of Ireland.'

'Arrah! what nonsense are you talking, girl?' said Mr. O'Brien.

'Is the idea,' asked Jack, 'to let the place to a hotel company?'

'No,' replied Kathleen, 'we should run it ourselves.'

The Miss O'Briens exchanged glances of consternation.

'I've worked it all out, father,' she continued, as she saw opposition. 'I am certain I can make it succeed. All through the winter for Englishmen and others who want to hunt with the Duhallows there could not be a better centre, and in the summer we shall get fishermen and tourists. I can show you that with any luck at all we shall make enough to pay the interest and keep our home.'

'A home, is it?' said Jack sarcastically.

'A hotel!' cried the old man. 'What's this I'm hearing from a daughter of mine? O'Brien of Ballyvodra turned hotel-keeper!'

'Kathleen, do you know what you're proposing? Have you no proper pride?' exclaimed Miss Bridget.

'No feelings for your family?' echoed Miss Honora.

'With a sign up over the hall door, I suppose,' cried Jem. '"W. O'Brien, licensed to sell spirits and tobacco, with Beaumish and Crawford's porter."'

'Is this your pretty scheme, then?' asked Mr. O'Brien. 'To disgrace us in the county?'

'It is,' replied Kathleen with some warmth, 'and I mean to carry it through, too. I don't like it any better than the rest of you, but I like it better than ruin. Afraid of being laughed at, are we? Are we going to say good-bye to the place for ever, and have our home broken up while there's a chance to keep it, for fear we'd be laughed at by people who are nothing to us? If it is our pride you're thinking

of, Aunt Bridget, I wouldn't give much for that when we're living in lodgings in Cork or England, and not a penny to pay your jointures with, and the life of a governess for me. If we want to disgrace the family we'll do it by giving up the place without a fight. I expected help from you, Jack, not sneers. And it means more to you than to any of us. Isn't it worth your while to put your false pride in your pocket for a time with the chance of some day owning the place that belonged to your ancestors; or is it a horse-coper or cattle-dealer you'd turn—I don't know what else you could do—for the honour of the family? And as for you,' she said, turning to Jem, 'I suppose you're thinking of the opinion of those fine young gentlemen in the bank. Indeed you're a great help to me!'

She held the reins always in the household, and the guidance of her hand was accepted as a rule; but now, to her brothers at least, her words fell with something of the touch of a whip. Some revelation of their own incapacity to help and a recognition of the fight she was making for them was the result.

'Papa,' she added, 'please let me explain to you what I want you to let me do.'

'Twill break my heart,' said the old man miserably.

'Not at all,' she said. 'Twould break your heart to see Aunt Bridget and Aunt Honora in poverty, and me slaving as a governess. We must all stand together and face our difficulties, and my plan is the only one. Now listen to me. In the first place I've arranged with the lawyer to get my money.'

'Ah, we won't touch it, girl,' interrupted Mr.

O'Brien ; and the others joined him in a chorus of protest.

'Tis arranged,' she continued. 'I'm the hotel company and I'm putting my money into a good investment. The first thing is to do up the house. The man that went over it with me last week wasn't a butcher at all but an architect ; and he's given me his word that five hundred pounds will cover all the painting and glazing and patching, and another five hundred pounds will cover the furniture we'll want in the bedrooms, and the china and glass and other things. There are fourteen rooms besides those we'll want for ourselves, and if it pays we can build on a tin wing next year. That's only a thousand, and leaves more than enough for all other expenses. The garden must be put in order, and we'll want three men at work in it to grow all our own vegetables ; and we'll want an omnibus to go to the station and a couple more carriages, for there's a lot to be made by the posting ; and with two or three more horses and those we have there'll be enough for the ordinary work, and we must have a good hunter or two to let out. Jack can see to the whole of that department. And then there's the fishing,' she continued, noticing a look of growing interest on the faces of her audience ; 'a mile of our own trout stream, and I'll answer for it Lord Shandon will give me a couple of salmon rods in the Black-water.'

'Will there be boating on the pond ?' asked Jem, whose sense of the ridiculous survived his recent castigation.

'And places of interest—places of historic interest in the neighbourhood,' Kathleen went on, ignoring the interruption. 'Americans love ruins.'

'Faith, they won't have to go outside the gates to see them,' said Jack.

'I tell you the first thing we shall do will be the repairs, sir,' she said. 'I am showing you the attractions of the place. Of course we shall put an advertisement in the *Field* and other papers. You see, papa, you would not be bothered about the hotel at all. You'd still have the property to manage, and you'd supply me with all the meat and butter and eggs we wanted. That would be a further profit. You needn't even see the people unless you like.'

'Oh !' said the old man, laughing unexpectedly, 'I thought you were going to put me in a glass office in the hall. But how did you think of it all? Indeed you have a great head.'

She rejoiced at this indication of improved spirits in her father, and felt that she was making good progress. 'We can all help,' she continued, 'in different ways ; but of course, Aunt Bridget, if you and Aunt Honora feel too proud to be mixed up with it, you can take rooms in Mallow or go abroad ; but I think you might find it amusing to stay and help.'

Again Mr. O'Brien was overcome with laughter. 'You've forgotten the bar, Kitty,' he said. 'Wouldn't your aunts look fine there with the young men paying them compliments through a little window ?'

'This is cruel, William,' moaned Miss Bridget.

Miss Honora emphasised the word 'unbrotherly!' with tears.

'Ah, what nonsense, girls !' said Mr. O'Brien. 'At your age you ought to be able to take a joke. If we're driven to thinking about it at all, 'tis well to make the best joke we can of it.'

‘Indeed, Aunt Bridget,’ said Kathleen, ‘I didn’t mean to be unkind. If we carry out the plan, and you care to stay, of course you would be invaluable. The accounts will have to be kept, and if we can do that ourselves without paying a book-keeper it will be a great saving. Well, now, I’ve told you my plan roughly, and if any one can suggest a better I’ll vote for it. But don’t forget what we have to face if we do nothing. You all know it too well.’

No suggestion was put forward, and after a brief silence she concluded: ‘It may only be for a few years; the hotel may pay well enough to help us over the bad times and give us something to put away towards paying off the charges. Oh, my dears,’ she cried, ‘think of the day when we’ll be able to shut up the hotel and send the last guest off about his business, and have the old place in our hands free again!’

‘Good luck to that day,’ said Jem, ‘but ’tis easy to be thinking about it. When did you propose to open your hotel, Kitty?’

‘Perhaps by the beginning of the hunting season,’ she replied, more to the inquiry in her father’s eyes than to her brother’s question; ‘but we must talk over all the details together, papa. You are not against me?’

‘Against you, my dear?’ he said affectionately; ‘and you trying to save us? But my mind is muddled with it all, and I’ll talk to you again about it in the morning. It may be God’s will that we shall be turned out of the old place for our sins and the sins of our fathers, while the English Government, a pack of Mountain Pharisees, desert us and throw us to the Land League blackguards like a bone to a dog; or indeed it may be His will to turn me

into a hotel-keeper. 'Tisn't for me to say. We must pray for guidance. Keep that before you, like good children, and when I kneel down to-night promise me that I won't be alone.'

Tears were in the old man's eyes, and at a sign from Kathleen the others rose and left the table. Presently she returned herself and found him still sitting at the table with his head buried in his hands. His trouble touched her heart, and tears filled her eyes also as she bent over and laid her head against his.

CHAPTER X

THE ENEMY'S CAMP

‘We are your Irish question,’ Miss Temple-Cloud had said of her sex to Michael Desmond ; and she, at least, offered to him some of the perplexities which our national demeanour presents to the English mind. He was ready to admit that there was some truth in her comparison of the attitude of man to woman with that of England to Ireland. In either case the stronger had asserted itself, and the weaker had either been taught the lesson of inferiority by force, or made the recipient of rival attentions at such times as the dominant forces were divided. Admitting this, Desmond was brought to see that his own attitude towards women had been inconsistent with his political creed. The independence which in Miss Temple-Cloud’s view must be achieved by her sex before man could hope to find her loyal in comradeship and love was itself akin to that for which his country was striving and he himself labouring with passionate devotion. But did she express the feminine mind, or might not her rebellious principles be taken as those of the exceptional and quite unrepresentative woman? He took the latter view. In discussing the perennially interesting relationship with Connor he found an opponent to his opinions. Perhaps on

no other subject is common experience of so little value, and what Michael called in his brother 'the chivalry of ignorance' may have been at least as near to a right conception as the tolerant cynicism which coloured his own theories.

The brothers were sitting together in the old room in the tower one evening, each with a disturbing lady in his thoughts, when the disputable subject was mentioned.

'It is better for a woman not to be clever,' said Michael; 'especially if she is good-looking. I don't think you can trust a beautiful woman with brains.'

He was thinking of Corinna, and was rather airing a doubt than expressing a conviction. Connor, mindful of Kathleen O'Brien, whom he believed to be both beautiful and clever, protested at once.

'Brains are her safeguard,' he replied; 'they preserve her from vanity.'

'They make her understand the value of her beauty too well,' said Michael.

'And suppose she does understand it?'

'She plots with it; she becomes discontented with a woman's proper part of dependence; her head shows her that she can turn her attractions to account, and get power by her influence over men; and her heart suffers.'

'Oh, but is her part dependence?' Connor disputed. 'I should say it was comradeship. And the sounder her head is the truer her heart will be.'

'That's a purely modern view,' said Michael. 'I once inclined to it, but experience has convinced me that a woman's heart is her best guide, and those of 'em with brains are dangerous. They're

like greyhounds : the too intelligent "run cunning" and defeat the purpose they were intended for.'

Connor laughed at the illustration.

'Besides,' continued Michael, 'a woman whose head rather than her heart guides her begins to ask why she should be subjected to moral restrictions which are not enforced on man.'

'And I expect she's right,' said Connor.

'No, you don't. You know that the history of the race has shown that it is impossible to impose on man the standard of virtue necessary for women, or to allow them the latitude we take.'

'Oh, I know,' said Connor impatiently ; 'and I never see a good girl but I feel ashamed of that theory.'

'I think you must be in love, old fellow,' Michael laughed, and returned to his book, leaving Connor to his reflections and the amusement of fitting the joints of an old fishing-rod which he had not used since his boyhood.

There was no doubt about Connor's condition : Michael's case was a less common one. There was nothing akin to Connor's chivalrous devotion to Kathleen O'Brien in his own absorbing interest in Corinna. Her charm for him had no help from the glamour which hides the blemishes from the lover's eyes. He studied her critically, and the more adversely he read certain traits in her character the more he felt the enchantment of her personality. Reflecting on the rapid growth of their intimacy he saw that it was she who had made this possible ; and he was left in doubt as to whether she had been influenced by her ambition to play a part in politics, or had been drawn towards him personally somewhat as he had been drawn to

her. The contemplation of the latter supposition encouraged daring fancies. The circumstances in which he found her as the betrothed of his hereditary foe gave such fancies an extraordinary fascination. To enter the hostile camp, to snatch her from the very arms of the enemy, would be an exploit fit to crown all his other triumphs. He did not deceive himself as to the chances of success in so wild an enterprise : she was within a couple of months of her marriage and was apparently well pleased with the prospect ; and yet there was something in her character, something in her manner towards himself, which encouraged him to the adventure.

Circumstances, or perhaps Corinna's deliberate cultivation of events, were in his favour. She was within reach, and the camp unguarded. Her proposition of spending a few weeks before her marriage at Duhallow Court and superintending its furnishing had been acceptable to Sir Henry for reasons of his own, though he had pretended to ridicule it. He had sent servants in advance to make arrangements for her comfort, entrusted her to the care and companionship of his sister, and, after seeing them off, made his own preparations for visiting Paris and completing the business transaction which was to free him of moral encumbrances. How far the delicacy of the situation might make valedictory demands on his gallantry as well as a call upon his purse he hardly knew ; but at all events they would be final ones, and with the memory of Corinna's captivating beauty in his thoughts, the contemplation of such a possibility had little attraction. He had had some indication of her independence, her pride of womanhood, her contempt for the moral code which men had made for

themselves ; and, while he hailed these qualities in the lady who was to be his wife with satisfaction, he had been somewhat uncomfortable since his engagement in the knowledge of his own nonconformity to her standard. As a man of the world he felt no regrets on account of past experiences, but as a lover he was anxious to obliterate all records of these. They were perhaps a possession, an asset, when viewed solely from his own point of view, but from that of the forthcoming partnership they became a bad debt to be written off. Thus in his conception was a man educated to be a good husband ; for since at one time or another of his life he must seek experiences, how much better that they should be done with before his marriage. He therefore said good-bye to Corinna, feeling that when they next met it would be on equal terms—he with the inevitable tribute which Nature imposes on her strong sons fairly paid, and she, as Nature aims to have it in her chosen daughters, without debt to cancel. It was a point of view readily acceptable among men, and expressed in terms of the sowing of 'wild oats' not seldom concurred in by charitable ladies ; but it was of all others the conclusion which aroused antagonism in the spirit of the girl he was going to marry. She did not know that he held it ; she had taken his word in denial of the scandal which her father had brought to her ; but a truer knowledge of her character would have taught him that he would have done better, if he wished to win her love, to abandon the theory and confess the trespass, than to cherish the one and conceal the other. He was satisfied that he was acting now with discretion, and a glance backward assured him that his life had been laid out to advantage, a glance

forward that he was making an admirable provision for the future. In addition to her personal attractions Corinna had all the qualities which a man in his position could ask for in a wife. Already she had helped him ; it was due to her influence that the Prime Minister and Desmond had met, with results which promised well for his ambition. He had come into contact with Desmond but little, and on the few occasions when they met he had accepted his frigid demeanour towards himself without offence, knowing that the good work was proceeding, and that he stood as its promoter in the eyes of his party. There was now little doubt that the Chief Secretaryship of Ireland would be offered to him if the present Government were re-elected ; and he not only recognised how much he was indebted to his clever *fiancée* for the establishment of his claims, but saw how eminently fitted she was to fulfil the part of wife to so exalted a personage. As to the intimacy which had grown between Corinna and Michael Desmond during the negotiations, and the marked contrast of his manner to her and to himself, he had little concern. She was playing his game for him, and he had equal confidence in her skill and her discretion. A word from his sister, always watchful and suspicious, as to the propriety of the growing comradeship was met with ridicule ; though perhaps if he had known that there was a probability of its continuance during her visit to Ireland, and this with fore-knowledge on both sides, he might have treated the matter less airily.

As it fell out Desmond was the companion of the ladies during part of their journey. Travelling by Milford and Cork, after spending a couple of nights on the way with friends in Clifton, they

encountered him in the lamplight of the docks as they were going on board the steamer. There, from the deference he commanded, he might have already been in Ireland, and Miss Desmond, though hardly pleased at the meeting, recognised its advantage in the instant attention they received in priority to the clamorous crowd of earlier arrivals. She was glad to go to her cabin while they were still in the smooth water of the Sound, and was too much occupied with the problem of avoiding seasickness to trouble much about the danger of the intimacy which was being advanced on deck in the starlight.

It was in these hours that the idea of daring to become his kinsman's rival had first taken hold of Michael Desmond; it was then Corinna had made him feel the full charm of her womanhood, and without a word of definite encouragement seemed to have invited him to try his chances. Before long all the passengers had gone below and these two had the ship almost to themselves, Corinna's preference of the deck to the cabin being rewarded by restful waters. There was no approach to love-making on his part, no coquetting on hers; but in all their talk there was a recognition of mutual interest, a feeling that there already existed an understanding between them which might not always remain unexpressed. Contrary to his habit he was unreserved in speaking of himself, his aims, and his love of his country. She had already assured him of some sympathy with his cause, and he aimed at winning her altogether to his views, appealing more to her head than to her sentiments, and growing eloquent about statistics and economic details on which ladies are neither expected to feel interest

nor have opinions ; and in thus placing her intellectually on his own level he had unconsciously chosen the one form of flattery she was ready to accept. He pleaded for her sympathy with Ireland as ardently as a lover might have pleaded for her hand ; and in winning it there was a feeling of triumph on his part, on hers of willing surrender, remotely akin to the lover's relationship. To him, indeed, the cause of his country had never looked so beautiful as when he was uplifting it before the eyes of this daughter of the enemy ; and, to her, something of his enthusiasm was imparted, though it was the man not the principles that fired her imagination. And through their talk the muffled rhythm of the engines and the gentle ripple of the water against the ship's sides made a pleasant undertone, and the mystery of the starlight above the summer sea threw a glamour on their pathway. England was far away, the first lights of the Irish coast low on the western horizon, before Corinna went to her cabin, leaving Desmond to walk the deck alone and dream of strange possibilities until the sun rose and the green shores of the harbour and the white walls of Queenstown shone over the water in a golden mist.

For a few days after their return they did not meet. Miss Desmond resigned herself to the prospect of some dull weeks, for the Shandons were not at home, and she had no interest in making new acquaintances in the county ; but she felt she was performing a duty in keeping a sisterly eye on Corinna. She admired her ; but more than ever since they had become intimate did she question the wisdom of her brother's choice. Corinna's views about men seemed a sort of blasphemy to her. She

herself was ready to accept man, as he was indicated for her in her prayer-book, with the ready loyalty which a good citizen gives to a king whose private conduct (and look at his temptations!) may not be quite all that might be wished.

Corinna was really less interested in the arrangement of the house and the planning of new gardens than she appeared to be. Her mind was constantly occupied with the thought of her coming marriage, more as it might have been if she were deliberating whether or not to accept a proposal than as one contemplating a thing settled. Her state of mind was peculiar, for she could find no definite reason for her restlessness. Sir Henry Desmond had not won her heart, but she recognised the improbability of any one winning it. She liked him, she admired Michael Desmond, she was in love with neither. Socially the match she was making was a brilliant one. She would be a great lady; she would find the opportunities she desired of making her influence felt among the leaders of men. And her husband! his past had no doubt been much the same as that of other men of the world, and henceforth he would be loyal to her. Why, therefore, should she vex herself about those episodes in his life which her father had referred to? She thought of Michael Desmond with a conviction that his views as to the relationship of the sexes were not unlike Sir Henry's and those of most men of the world. Where was the really chivalrous gentlemen who held her views?—who could approach a girl he expected to be spotless without the ghosts of old secrets turning uneasily in their graves? She laughed, picturing him in the guise of the mild curate or the respectable burgess, and rejected him in favour of the pleasanter type of man

whom she had met in the world and knew to be companionable.

She nevertheless remained discontented with her prospect, fretted with the feeling that she was compromising her principles. 'If only,' she thought, 'I had something to confess or to conceal myself it would put us on equal terms.' To drop to a man's standard since he could not be uplifted to hers was not an ennobling fancy, but in playing with it it seemed to imply to her less a sacrifice of feminine honour than one made in its vindication.

It was understood in the neighbourhood that the ladies at Duhallow Court were not expecting to receive calls. The rector's wife went to see them, and was asked to report them as in a state of picnic among furniture vans, and Kathleen O'Brien, who in response to a special invitation from Corinna, whom she met at the rectory, walked over one morning to inspect progress and give her advice as a gardener, was the only other visitor. She was a little in awe and yet curious to see more of this beautiful young English woman who, though no older than herself, had the manner and bearing which spoke of experience of that great world which lay beyond her own horizon. At the ball she had watched her with almost resentful admiration, imagining her as proud and reserved except perhaps to the chosen few. She was surprised when they met again to find her something more than merely friendly,—anxious, it seemed, to establish comradeship from the outset, and much more inclined to talk of the county, the people, and the things on which Kathleen had the knowledge than of her own world.

'And you're not engaged?' Corinna said to her

as they came down to the river side after finishing their inspection of the gardens.

'Indeed I'm not,' Kathleen answered. 'I've no time to think of such things with a family already to look after. We're all too poor here to get married, and we know it ; so we just flirt with each other knowing it means nothing, like people who play reckless cards when there's no money on the game. Indeed, I'm in no hurry.'

Problems as to the relationship of the sexes had never troubled her fresh and healthy mind. She knew what it was to face definite tangible troubles, not subjective perplexities ; and when the thought of love came, as it must come at times to the least sentimental of girls, it suggested to her not questions, but an answer to questions—not problems, but a solution of things in life that had seemed difficult. She liked men as comrades, and could give them her friendship, which was in itself a safeguard against intrusion, as the open gate may be a better security against trespassers than a warning notice. The one man who had touched her imagination was Michael Desmond, the hero of her childhood—her hero still in spite of the worst that could be said of him ; but though she did not closely examine her feelings for him, she never pictured him as a lover. Indeed, men as admirers occupied her attention far less than might have been expected of a young lady who possessed in so considerable a degree the quality of attraction.

Before she left, Miss Temple-Cloud mentioned Desmond's name.

'Oh yes,' she replied, in answer to her question, 'I have known him since I was a child. He saved my life then.'

She was pressed for details of the incident.

‘He is exactly the sort of man I can picture doing such a thing,’ Corinna said when she had heard the story. ‘You might find a hundred men brave enough for it for one who would do it. They would not have seen what to do, or would not have been prompt enough. It’s the way in his public career—he acts while his opponents are considering. But politics don’t interest you.’

‘Only as far as they affect our rents,’ Kathleen replied.

‘Ah yes, you have an interest in the stakes. Mine is merely in the game itself and the players. Have you seen anything of Mr. Desmond lately?’

‘Not since he returned,’ Kathleen answered.

‘Nor I,’ said Corinna. ‘We travelled over part of the way together, and received more than our share of attention in consequence, and some of the discomforts of a royal progress, for at Cork station we could hardly get across the platform to a carriage. I have been expecting him to call.’

‘Oh, I don’t think he will call here,’ said Kathleen. ‘I mean,’ she added in some confusion, ‘there is a family tradition about it.’

‘Do tell me what you mean,’ Corinna asked with great interest.

‘Have you heard nothing about the old feud between his branch of the family and yours—Sir Henry’s?’ Kathleen asked, a little anxious as to whether she had been indiscreet in her allusion.

‘Something that took place generations ago, but I have no idea what it was about and thought it was forgotten. But the tradition? Please tell me what it is. You see I am to be one of the family and it interests me.’

‘I believe the quarrel was about the property,’

Kathleen replied, 'and that ever since it took place none of the Desmonds of Duhallow have ever been to the Court. I think they made a sort of vow never to cross the threshold till the place belonged to them again.'

'And you don't think he will come to see me, then?' Corinna asked, with an amused look.

'I hardly know. You may be able to break the tradition, but the Desmonds are not easy to influence.'

'Well, we shall see,' said Corinna. 'Now tell me what day I may come and see your garden.'

'To-morrow, any day, Miss Temple-Cloud; but 'tis only weeds and ruins we have to show you. And to think what it might be! When you see it you will be able to guess what it feels like to be poor.'

'I have always been poor too. Perhaps if you marry a rich man and have as many gardens as you like, you may not care more for the garden. You can now feel that your flowers are your own.'

'Indeed, I don't know,' Kathleen laughed. 'I suppose there's a mortgage on them.'

'What can a woman call her own?' said Corinna, with an unreserve that surprised Kathleen. 'What can she call her own except her maidenhood? And if she keeps that too long it loses all its value. Perhaps it's because I'm going to be married so soon that I'm in love with my freedom, and almost envy you for not being engaged.'

Kathleen's only comment was a smile. 'I'll expect you on Friday afternoon,' she said as they parted, 'and I hope Miss Desmond will come too.'

As she walked home her thoughts were a good deal occupied with her new acquaintance. There was something in her beauty which disturbed her, like those passages of music which trouble the heart while

they satisfy the ear. And in much that she had said she felt there was a meaning to which she had not the key. The sight, however, of a mason at work on the piers of the front gates put Miss Temple-Cloud and her perplexing remarks in the background, and she returned to the consideration of the progress of her hotel scheme.

Immediately after her departure Corinna went to her room and wrote a note to Desmond to say that they were beginning to conquer their confusion, and that she would be disengaged next morning if he could find time to call.

He came, but did not cross the threshold, nor was he on this occasion invited to do so. It was the first of many meetings. An hour with Corinna in the garden, a ride with her before breakfast on a dewy September morning, and an evening walk through the fields by the river, following each other at short intervals, changed him from a calculating to a passionate lover. And if there were any chance of success for him it was helped by the change. Deliberation and caution may be the fitter tactics for a long campaign, but when the time is short and the position desperate, the fortress, if it be won at all, must be taken by storm. It was as the betrothed of his enemy she had at first seemed to him so alluring a prize: now the attraction was wholly her own. She had won him and he knew it, which meant that he knew that there was no possibility of his turning back in his attempt to win her. Heart and head were quickened, and, as the fires grew, the will rose to keep them under control, even as it had been in his political career, when the stronger the popular emotion which had carried him along the surer had grown his self-command. As to asking himself whether it was

honourable to attempt to win a lady who had promised her hand to another, he would have been as likely to question his right of endeavouring to win a political vote pledged elsewhere. In war, scruples are the first sacrifices; and though the war had not actually been declared, though no definite word had been spoken which revealed him as his kinsman's rival, it was only the word that was wanting: it was imminent. The time for his great venture was at hand, and his heart was a boy's at the prospect.

CHAPTER XI

DESMOND AND CORINNA

THE meetings of Desmond and Miss Temple-Cloud attracted attention and invited comment in many places. Mrs. Desmond observed and was thoughtful, but said nothing. Connor made a jesting allusion to the sudden friendship in a conversation with Kathleen O'Brien, to find her apparently without any interest in the subject. Miss Desmond was growing anxious. She had placed herself on sentry duty, and felt called upon to challenge the intrusive presence in the camp. She began with a somewhat timid protest. Her 'Don't you think, Corinna, that Mr. Desmond's visits are rather frequent, and it might be as well to discourage them?' was met with a laughing rejoinder, 'I would not discourage him for the world: he is one of the few men I have met in my life who are worth knowing'; but she reopened the subject one afternoon a day or two later when Corinna had just come in from a ride with Desmond, and this time she spoke plainly.

'You must forgive me for saying that I don't think you are acting discreetly, dear,' she said, with a look which emphasised the words. 'Of course, I do not suggest for a moment that your friendship with Mr. Desmond is undesirable, but there might

be misinterpretations. People are so ready to gossip, and if any foolish talk came to Henry's ears——'

'Did he suggest that you should keep an eye on me?' Corinna asked.

'I am his sister, Corinna.' Miss Desmond preserved her dignity.

'Have you written to express your fears to Henry?'

'No; but it might be my duty to do so. I am older than you, Corinna, and you must not be angry with me for speaking plainly. It is not fair to Henry in his absence that you should be so constantly in the society of a man who is no friend of his. I am sure, when you think it over, you will see that I am right.'

'But supposing that I should not be able to see it from your point of view?'

'I should not consent to remain here any longer, and you could not remain alone. But I am sure you will be sensible. You must know that it is painful to me to criticise your conduct.'

'I have heard that the severest critics are disappointed authors,' said Corinna, leaving Miss Desmond to puzzle at the meaning of a reply which she suspected to be sarcastic.

The effect of the warning was exactly the reverse of its intention. Corinna despatched a note to her forbidden friend suggesting the following day for a walk they had projected to Kilcolman Castle, and when the time came she set out on the expedition exhilarated by the reflection that she was still her own mistress.

She felt it necessary to make some excuse to Desmond for having sent for him. 'My time is shorter than I had expected,' she told him. 'Miss

Desmond is talking about returning ; she finds it dull here.'

'And do you not ?' said he.

'I delight in it. I am surprised to find myself so contented in this out-of-the-world place. I have a feeling of freedom here. I can understand your love of Ireland. You have made me share it.'

'I am very proud of that,' he said.

'I wish I could do as much with you for England.'

'England !' he replied. 'No ! and do you care ? It is your sex, not your country, inspires you. If I am a rebel, so are you. If I am for Ireland, you are for women. If you are on my side, I am on yours. We have made each other understand.'

She felt a glow of pleasure and pride at his admission, and she gave him a look full of gratitude.

'We need champions,' she said. 'The world is against us—nearly every man, and indeed many women. We are guarded. Is that not enough to make us ready to elude our guards ? Miss Desmond has protested against my meeting you.'

He heard it with satisfaction, recognising that the confession established an understanding between them.

'On Sir Henry's account ?' he ventured.

'Possibly ! She is a good sister.'

'Perhaps it was on mine.'

'Why yours ?' she asked.

'Well, sometimes it is the men who want protection. A man may be in danger of growing too deeply interested where the most he can hope for is friendship.'

He spoke these words with the tone of one discussing generalities, and without looking at her ; but the meaning was too significant to escape notice.

'I suppose,' she said, 'it is almost impossible for a man to care for a woman disinterestedly.'

'Quite impossible,' he answered. 'The more he cares, the greater sacrifices he would make for her, the more he wants to possess her—or at least her love.'

'You make a distinction between possessing her and her love.'

'Yes,' he replied, 'and yet either would be poverty without the other.'

'Mr. Desmond, I am interested. Tell me which poverty would you choose? I mean, if you were in love, would you, if you had the chance, marry the girl knowing she could not love you, or see her married to another and know that her heart was yours?'

'Her body without her soul, or her soul without her body?' he put the question.

'Yes, it would be that.'

'I am afraid it would be the ignoble choice. I could not bear to see her married to another.'

'I expected it,' she said. 'There is the difference between a man and a woman. I would make the other choice.'

'Are you sure?' he asked. 'That is the decision of Love untouched by Passion. Men cannot separate these. Some women may, but you—are you of these?'

'Perhaps we do not know ourselves until we are tested,' she answered with a slight flush.

Such conversations as these brought them to a closer intimacy each time they met. Nevertheless it is a difficult step from discussion to confession when the subject is love. Desmond had come near to taking it, and perhaps Corinna perceived this,

for she suddenly changed the topic and called his attention to the beauty of the pathway.

'This is really the sweetest little stream in the world,' she said. 'It is a mountain stream that has lost its way in the meadows. I love the rocky bed and the little rapids and clear pools between grassy lowland banks. I know it below the surface too. I have had a dip nearly every morning in the pool above the garden.'

The open-air life had brought a new colour to her face, and had given the pale beauty which had suggested the moonlight to Desmond a warmer glow. If not more lovely now than on that night at Shandon House when she had first fascinated him, she was more winsome; her beauty, if less striking, was more satisfying,—brought nearer to the heart, it seemed, by the loving touch of nature.

He looked at her with an admiration which it was difficult not to express, and turned away to avoid her questioning eyes.

'So you are going to be married,' he said, with apparent irrelevance.

'If you please, sir,' she replied with a bow.

'Where have you learnt so much about men and women? You are very young although you are so wise.'

'You are very fatherly although you are a bachelor. And why? I really think a man ought not to be allowed to marry if he waits too long. You know, in the English public schools, if a boy doesn't earn his promotion he has to leave.'

Desmond laughed. 'Unless he is extra good at games. But your illustration will not work out. Some of us—I am one of them—have had more important duties. I suppose I have been waiting,

expecting to fall in love. It is bad, perhaps, to wait too long ; but it is better than deciding too soon.'

'For a man, perhaps,' she said, as though on her defence ; 'but women must decide when their opportunity comes. Marriage is our career. Men may marry whom they like and where they love, no matter how humbly they choose, and make their careers independently. We have no such choice.'

'I believe a woman's career is to marry the man she loves best, whatever the consequences may be.'

'And suppose no one has won her love, must she remain unmarried ?'

'It depends on the woman. Some of them grow fond of their husbands. Some fall in love when it is too late. But, believe me, there is no prison on earth so dark as that which some women—those who could realise their freedom in love—make for themselves in a loveless marriage. And turn to the other picture, where in choosing love she finds her career, where her husband's ambition is hers, and his best achievements are inspired by her. In giving her love she finds it written in all he does, whether it be in his service of her, or his fellow-creatures, or his country.'

He spoke with unusual warmth of feeling, in contrast to his usual self-contained manner, and the purport of his words so nearly applied to her that it seemed as though he had read her heart, and exposed the very doubts which she endeavoured to conceal from herself. She faced him boldly.

'You speak very pointedly,' she said. 'I hope you are not making me your text.'

'You are not like other girls,' he replied. 'I confess I was thinking of possibilities.'

‘Are you not extraordinarily presumptuous?’

‘I am extraordinarily interested.’

She failed to find the words she wanted to express reproof coupled with condonation, and remained silent, thus allowing him a new foothold of intimacy; but before he had time to follow up his advantage she checked him. ‘Mr. Desmond,’ she said, ‘I don’t think I will go on to the Castle this morning. I begin to fear Mrs. Desmond might not care for my visit. Of course I understand her not calling on me, as I know she goes nowhere; but from what I have heard of your family tradition the future wife of Sir Henry Desmond could hardly be welcome.’

‘For your own sake, and as my friend, you would be welcome. My mother would be honoured by your visit,’ he said.

‘But these are not my credentials. Shall we go back?’ she objected, turning as she spoke. ‘What is the old feud between the branches of your family? Henry does not even seem to know of it, but I gather from something Miss O’Brien said that your people still feel strongly about it.’

‘I suppose those who are injured have longer memories than those who inflict the wrong,’ said Desmond.

‘But tell me what it is. I might become the peacemaker.’

He was reluctant to tell the story which awakened his bitterest feelings, and could not be related without showing her that his contempt extended to the present representative of the unforgiven traitor. He resented, too, the diversion in their talk from the intimate themes which had been leading in the direction he desired.

‘We were disinherited,’ he said, ‘by the action of

Sir Henry's ancestor. The lands he holds were ours. It is not a pleasant story.'

She laughed. 'Henry had strong ancestors, then. I shall think the more highly of him; I believe in ancestry. Of course long ago it was the strong who disinherited the weak.'

She could hardly have said anything so potent to arouse his anger as in this suggestion of Sir Henry's descent from a strong and masterful branch of the family which had shown its right of might over his, the weaker, line.

'It was the strength that Jacob showed in supplanting Esau,' he said. 'I cannot suppose you admire that. He was the younger brother, and he took advantage of a scandalous law which enabled him to disinherit the elder by forswearing his faith and becoming a Protestant. He was a traitor to his country, his faith, and his family; and the bitterest thing in the whole world to me is the thought that you are going to marry his descendant.'

'Oh, Mr. Desmond,' she cried, 'how is it possible for you and me to be friends?'

The outburst of hereditary hatred had carried with it a disclosure of his love not in the manner he had intended. He made no attempt at evasion. 'No,' he said, 'if you marry Sir Henry Desmond we cannot be friends—not because I should hate him, but because I love you.' He spoke calmly, with nothing of the lover's fervour, and the look he gave her as he spoke had more of command than entreaty.

She was surprised, and for a moment remained silent. Then she turned to Desmond with a laugh that was not quite natural. 'Oh, my friend, are you amusing yourself? Are you playing with me? You do not wish me to take you seriously?'

‘Yes,’ he replied, looking at her steadily. ‘I love you, and you know I am serious.’

‘Love!’ she echoed. ‘Yes, I have heard that wicked word from many men, but I did not expect it from you. I have heard it from young men who wanted to marry me, and from old men I have made fools of; and I have heard it from men married to good women, who dishonoured the word in speaking it. There may be love in the world, but I have not found it. In years of service, in self-sacrifice, love may prove itself; but this desire which a man feels for a woman who has personal attractions is not love. You do not know me. How can you love me?’

‘I know you as no other man has known you or will know you,’ he replied, controlling himself to speak calmly. ‘It is because I know you that I love you. I have read your heart and I have found my comrade, and if your beauty has won my admiration does that make my love less true? Because I cannot look at you without delight, is my spirit blind? It has seen its mate, and henceforth it is wedded or widowed.’

Though he spoke with outward composure there was an intense fervour in his words. She found it difficult to reply. Conflicting emotions of triumph and regret possessed her. She could not think clearly. She hardly knew the nature of her feelings towards him. Without being in love with him she felt the magnetism of his influence. She could not disguise it from herself that she had paved the way for him to his declaration, and knowing the hypocrisy of her subterfuge she sought refuge behind conventional safeguards.

‘I ought not to have made this possible,’ she said. ‘You forget that I have promised my love to

another. It is dishonourable for you to speak these things and for me to listen.'

'Don't mock me,' he cried, 'with a word. Honour! You have both the heart and the brains to know what that means. If you were a wife whose husband loved her, a mother with children—even a girl for whom the man she had promised to love had proved his devotion—there might be some virtue in the word. But what is he?—'

He had a momentary impulse to speak of Sir Henry as he knew of him in his past relations with women, but he checked himself. As a gentleman the point of honour forbade him to repeat scandal about his rival. A great deal may be fair in love and war, and Desmond had few scruples, but here was a limit.

'Is a man,' he continued, 'to be denied his chance of winning a woman because he comes late in the field? His chances are lessened, but should he be forbidden the right to fight for her? If the man who is first is not strong enough to hold her against all comers, does he deserve her? My God, if I had been first there would have been no rival!'

The passionate conviction of his words threw a spell over her, but she felt bound to make a protest against his assumption.

'I have told you I do not love you,' she said.

'Dear girl,' he said, 'are you sure of it?'

'Mr. Desmond, you must leave me. I cannot listen to any more. If it is possible I still would keep your friendship.'

'May I see you again?'

She kept her eyes on the ground as she replied. 'If you can be my friend. But please leave me now.'

'I will try to do everything you ask of me,' he

said ; ' but promise me not to leave Ireland without seeing me once more.'

' Yes,' she replied, ' I will promise that.'

She had dismissed him, but the look he gave her as they parted was not that of a man who has been rejected.

Corinna when alone tried, with an excited imagination, to face calmly the position in which she found herself. She did not love the man she was going to marry, neither did she love Desmond : she merely preferred him. If she had loved him she would have asked no other excuse for accepting his love in spite of her plighted troth. She knew that she would have done it, even now at the eleventh hour, with all her wedding arrangements made, and in face of the world's criticism. Love would have exonerated her, but not preference. Apart from honourable considerations, too, as a young woman of the world who balanced advantages, this preference was not sufficient, it seemed to her, to compensate for the sacrifices. Her alliance with Sir Henry Desmond assured her position in society ; it had the approval of the Prime Minister ; it gave her wealth as well as influence. Desmond was a poor man comparatively ; he was a Roman Catholic ; and though he had made a name in the world and was worshipped in his country, as his wife she would be removed from those circles of society which she aspired to lead. She made the most of these practical considerations to fortify herself against an inclination to remember Desmond's confession with pleasure. His bold pleading in the teeth of exceptional difficulties appealed to her. It was a wooing such as she had dreamt of, and yet she was not won. She admired and yet resented his masterfulness. He had asserted his

strength as a man in the attack, and she had hardly maintained her defences as a woman in meeting it. She had promised to see him again, and would then assert her freedom from his influence. And he loved her, it seemed ! ' And there is no reward a girl can give a man,' she thought ; ' there is nothing between marriage and rejection.' Her mind was a whirl of new emotions as she walked homeward.

The duel between Miss Desmond and Corinna was renewed at lunch-time. The elderly lady was seriously concerned on her brother's account, but she made no further direct remonstrance with the wilful girl. She was determined to act decisively.

' I have made all arrangements to leave for England to-morrow by the middle day train to Dublin,' she told her. ' I mentioned that we should be going to your maid, so that she might get on with your packing.'

' So she told me,' said Corinna. ' She waited to get my instructions, but I suppose she as well as Sir Henry's other servants are at present under your orders. I have no intention of leaving to-morrow.'

' My dear Corinna, you cannot possibly remain alone !'

' Of course, if you think so, you can stay.'

' I have given you my reasons once,' said Miss Desmond. ' I have spoken to you as a sister, with your own welfare as much as my brother's at heart. You have continued to act in a way which I cannot possibly countenance. If I have spoken my mind too severely, forgive me, but I entreat you to be reasonable. If it will hurry you to get ready by to-morrow I will make it the day after.'

' We had arranged to stay for another fortnight, I think,' said Corinna.

'Yes, if special circumstances had not arisen to make a change of plans necessary.'

'I cannot admit any necessity.'

'You have only to tell me that you will discontinue your interviews with this Mr. Desmond and I will gladly remain.'

'Oh,' cried Corinna, 'am I a school-girl, or a slave being safeguarded for a harem? I do not wish to speak rudely, but I am indifferent whether you go or stay. I shall choose my own time.'

Her outburst of anger almost frightened Miss Desmond, but it did nothing to shake her determination. She rose and left the room with a pale face, knowing that she had done her duty, and wishing that it might have been possible for her brother to have witnessed the scene. She believed he was about to marry a girl he did not know, and that trouble was in store for him.

An afternoon's meditation had a sobering effect on Corinna. Since Michael Desmond had declared his love for her, and as she had no intention of accepting it, she saw that it would be unwise on all accounts, and unfair to him, if she allowed the interviews to continue. She had promised to see him again before she left Ireland, but it was best that the interview should be a short one and quickly over. Not knowing the cause which had influenced her, Miss Desmond was somewhat taken by surprise when Corinna abruptly reopened the subject after dinner that evening.

'I think I will come with you to-morrow,' she said.

'Forgive me, Corinna, if I seemed to distrust you,' Miss Desmond murmured.

'I shall leave you to explain our reasons for anticipating our time or departure.'

Miss Desmond looked disturbed.

'I have no objection to your giving your real reason,' Corinna added. 'No, really, I don't want to perplex you. You can say I could not bear to be parted from Henry any longer, and I dragged you back against your will, if you like.'

'Perhaps to-morrow may be hurrying you a little, dear,' said Miss Desmond. 'Shall we say the day after, or even Friday?'

'Oh no,' Corinna answered. 'I am sure you are not enjoying yourself, so let it be to-morrow.'

For answer Miss Desmond kissed her cheek, not without an effort.

The morrow, however, brought letters which again altered Corinna's decision, and were, indeed, destined to have a remarkable effect on her subsequent conduct. The first was from Sir Henry Desmond, and was dated two days previously from his club in London.

MY DEAREST CORINNA—I have heard you ridicule the daily letters of lovers, and I remember the epistle you invented in which the absent gentleman described the purchase of a piece of household furniture in the language of passion. But what must you think of five whole days without a line from me? I could hardly have believed it possible myself, and the only excuse I am going to make is that I cannot even allow myself to think of my darling when my mind is occupied with business details and small worries. Now my uncongenial duties are nearly over, and by the time we meet I hope to have all my arrears of work completed, and nothing to prevent me from devoting my whole time to the study of the one theme which has become to me worth attention, and which I am more than ever thankful I have neglected hitherto.

Corinna involuntarily shrugged her shoulders and continued to read :

Your last dear letter gave me a delightful account of your picnic life at Duhallow, and the picture I have of your coming in hungry for breakfast after your dip in the river—I had no idea swimming was one of your accomplishments—and looking as fresh and beautiful as the morning itself, almost impels me to take the next train and come over to Ireland. Every day seems wasted now that I am parted from you. Lucia wrote also, but less enthusiastically, about the place. She has become rather a creature of habits, and cannot, like you, enter into the unusual and wild life of the country, and the service at the church does not seem to suit her. I am really glad she has had the opportunity of getting to know you well. Like all good sisters, she has always thought there was no girl good enough to marry her brother, but I am convinced by now that she has come to the conclusion that even I, the wonderful brother, am unworthy of you.

Corinna smiled and continued :

So you have seen something of Michael Desmond. Fenton tells me that the Prime Minister is more than satisfied with the result of the negotiations, and is confident the English people will accept the solution of the Irish question which the Bill provides. He always believes the people will see sooner or later as he sees, and in this case I believe he is right. No one knows better than he how much we owe to you, and the more I think of the way in which you managed our irreconcilable Irish leader the prouder I feel of you. If the Bill goes through, as I believe it will, we shall have little more of the Irish question and less of Michael Desmond. In Ireland it is the agitator, not the statesman, who is popular, and in an Irish Parliament he will cease to be a power. He is a disturbing, not a governing genius. But this is not our affair. The good of England, indeed of Ireland, concerns us, not his career. If we get in, there is no doubt I am to have the Chief Secretaryship and—you have made me ambitious—later on who knows what? London is empty, the club is deserted, and nothing but business has kept me here. The Careys have asked me for Sunday to Taplow, and I may go. Ten days or a fortnight at latest I

suppose will bring you back to me, or shall I come over for you? I am growing impatient. The Prime Minister is taking immense interest in the wedding. Some of the most interesting people in the country I hear have invitations to stay at Wilton Towers for the occasion, and it promises to be very brilliant. I am glad Lady Violet is going to be a bridesmaid; that completes the number, I think. I am waiting for your return to choose their presents. I expect you will find the month you have allowed yourself for final preparations almost too short—for me it is far too long. Good-bye, dearest girl; I know that you do not like the look of the language of love on paper, so I must repress myself and keep the best things I have to say until we meet.—Ever your devoted

HENRY DESMOND.

She spent some thoughtful moments before taking up her other letter, and, after opening it, she read to the second sheet before it aroused her interest. It came from her friend Valerie Pernet, now Comtesse de Prayon, whom she had known first at school and afterwards as a companion in a long European tour. This had been before her friend's marriage, and at a time when Corinna had been glad of the opportunity of seeing something of the life of foreign capitals in the society of a family of position, without expense to herself and in exchange for the lightest and pleasantest of duties.

The letter, which was dated from Paris, began by an expression of sorrow from her friend that she could not come to England for Corinna's wedding on account of numerous engagements, and went on to relate her recent gaieties and occupations.

'It is as a married woman,' she said, 'that one embraces the pleasures of life: not that your husband furnishes these for you, but *he* is your conductor towards them. Ah, you will understand: just as your mountain guide is necessary until you have reached the summit and look out on the

prospect. Corinna, my beloved, you were always to me as the elder, and gave me many lectures on the conduct of girls towards men. Now I have pleasure in finding myself the adviser. To men you would give no greater freedom than to girls; you would make no allowance for their indiscretions before marriage. That is your English view, and it makes of men impostors—they pretend to be what you would have them—and they deceive you. In France we do not ask the impossible, and the men we have not compelled to lie to us before marriage are truer to us afterwards. I hear you cry out with indignant protest, but you will see I am right. May you be very happy in your marriage. By the way—but is this a secret, perhaps, which I should not disclose?—I have seen Sir Henry Desmond. But you will know he has been here since five days. If not, dear friend, who have so often given me good advice, it is good that you should know. You see that I cannot help showing that I enjoy finding myself in the position of mentor to you, and I speak, not to take a little revenge on you for some things you said of my Count before our marriage, but because I really would give my friend useful counsel. If Sir Henry has posed for you in the attitude the English lady asks and would have you think him, like that dear King Arthur of your poet Tennyson whom we read so often at Miss Farley's, then I say it is good you should know that he is like all the others. You know it. You use your knowledge discreetly and it will serve you well. He knows you have both eyes to see and charity to overlook, and he is your friend, and your freedom is secure. Men have this freedom before marriage, we may take ours afterwards. But in truth Sir Henry is capering—but that word is too undignified—very near to the altar, and, knowing my friend's views, I confess I was angry to see him occupied in another direction within a month of claiming her. No doubt it is an old attachment, and Miss Bell has some charms for men, though she is but a poor actress in French eyes. Twice I have myself seen them driving together, and my husband says he is the guest of Mademoiselle. Well, there is my story. Have I been unkind to tell it? I think not. Nor would I have it that you should think with less kindness of

your *fiancé*, as you would have had me regard the poor Count, but make wise use of your knowledge and——'

Corinna read no more. She crushed the letter in her hand and flung it on the floor, and presently began pacing up and down her room with a pale face and firmly set lips. After a while she picked up the crumpled ball of paper from the floor and compared the date of the two letters. The time given for Sir Henry's visit to Paris corresponded with that during which he had not written. Corinna knew her friend's character, and believed that she had taken a malicious pleasure in what she had written, but she did not doubt its truth. The mention of the name of Miss Bell, too, confirmed the story which her father had told her. A line or two in Sir Henry's letter caught her eye: 'and by the time we meet I hope to have all my arrears of work completed, and nothing to prevent me from devoting my whole time to the study of the one theme which has become for me worth attention, *and which I am more than ever thankful I have hitherto neglected.*' She mentally italicised the last sentence in her contemptuous anger.

She was deeply moved, but was sufficiently in command of her emotions to know that she could not then see her position clearly or decide on her course of action. It was one of those critical times when action is the parent, not the child, of vision. The course of her conduct was decided by instinct; mists surrounded her; and it was not until she had taken untraceable steps that she saw on what path she had been treading.

All arrangements had been made for their departure for England that afternoon. Without giving any explanation Corinna informed Miss Desmond

that she had decided not to accompany her. The bewildered lady essayed to influence her, first by show of firmness, then by reasonable persuasion. She went one step farther ; she postponed her departure until the following day, hoping that by then Corinna would have come to her senses. She was still unmovable, and a scene followed in which Miss Desmond showed unexpected warmth and Corinna provoking indifference. There is no doubt the good sister had done her duty and had been sorely tried. Her most fervent hope—she hardly dared to make it a prayer—as she drove away alone from Duhallow was that Corinna might pursue her rebellious conduct to a point where she would reveal herself in her true colours to Sir Henry and save him from the unhappiness of a miserable marriage.

CHAPTER XII

DESMOND AND CORINNA—THE AFTERNOON

ON the day after his last interview with Corinna, Desmond was due at Galway to speak in support of the candidature of a friend at a bye-election which was attracting more than usual public attention. In his own interest as well as that of his ally it was desirable that he should be present. Rumours of his recent negotiations with the Government were abroad, and a section of his party, the extremists who drew their inspiration from America, had shown signs of discontent. Their leader, Mr. Keefe, the only man who had made any attempt to question Desmond's supremacy, was expected at the meeting, and might turn his chief's absence to his own advantage. A telegram of reminder reached Michael in the evening, an urgent letter from a colleague the following morning; and the fact that to these he returned a bald message merely regretting his inability to be present, and then dismissed from his mind a matter which at any other time would have been to him of supreme importance, may be taken as an indication of the completeness of his absorption in his desperate attempt to win Corinna.

Later in the morning news came to Desmond that the Duhallow Court carriage, preceded by a

cart with luggage, had passed on the way to the railway station. He hardly thought it possible that Corinna could have broken her promise and left without seeing him, but he was not confident of her, and to end his suspense rode down to the village and made inquiries at the Court lodge. The news that Miss Desmond had gone, alone, quickened his pulses and gave him much to think about on his way home. The mere fact that she was alone fired his imagination, and it was with difficulty that he checked an impulse to seek an interview immediately, instead of waiting to receive a communication from her. He was rewarded for his patience by finding a note from her on his return, telling him that Miss Desmond had left rather suddenly, and that she was probably going the next day herself. 'As I promised to say good-bye,' she said, 'come round and have tea with me this afternoon, if you have nothing better to do.'

The lover's heart in him leapt. He put the letter to his lips like a boy, and yet the critical eye of the man of the world was not blind. He smiled as he read the words, 'if you have nothing better to do,' and did not fail to commend their artfulness.

A ship escaping from an enemy, running under full canvas before strong winds without chart or compass towards unknown seas, might give some illustration of Corinna's present condition. She made no attempt to shape her course and allowed circumstances to be her guide. If she had loved Sir Henry Desmond her way might have been clear. She might have gone to him and asked an explanation, either to forgive him or break off her engagement. As it was, she had no jealousy. Self-love, not love, was wounded. She felt that she had

received in person the full force of the affront which the world permits man to place on woman. The strongest feeling she was definitely conscious of was a desire to avenge the insult, and the mere refusal to marry the offender seemed to her a colourless and inadequate way of doing this. Her course would have been clear, too, if she had loved Michael Desmond. Then she could have married him and passed by the false lover with contempt. But no man had yet won her heart. At a crisis in her life when love would have been her safeguard, she was left at the mercy of passions uninspired by love. And so, not yet decided that she would refuse to marry Sir Henry, yet feeling herself free from any obligation to him; unable to return Michael Desmond's love, yet willing to listen to it; with a secret feeling of satisfaction that her relationship with the one man might justify the jealousy of the other; gay and defiant and wilfully thoughtless, she went out to discover her fate.

It was one of those summer days when the southwest wind deepens the blue of our island skies. The sweep of shadows across the country told of the movement of white clouds which seemed almost at rest; and the wind came and went like the sunshine—now setting the tree-tops swaying and all the leaves rustling, and now dying away in a whisper. The wide Duhallow uplands, within their ring of distant mountains, were flooded with light and colour. The field of oats ran in golden waves before the wind; the shadows on the mountain slopes took the purple of the iris; and, below the white cottages of the village, a reach of the river ruffled by the wind shone steel-blue in the sunshine.

Hurrying along the river path in the afternoon

on his way to the Court, Desmond saw Corinna coming towards him. She was dressed to meet the sunshine ; and the merry wind that sought playmates in all things that came in its path to-day made her bend her head as she faced it to keep her hat in place, and fluttered the skirts of her dress about her feet. As they drew near she gave Desmond a smile which would have gladdened the heart of a happy lover, and was too gay to encourage one whose eyes sought hope in the loved one's discontent.

'Are you not surprised to find me here still ?' she asked.

'No,' he replied, 'you promised.'

'You know Miss Desmond has gone, but you must not think I remained to keep my promise. I am afraid I should have broken it if I had not other reasons for staying, or perhaps hardly reasons. Really, it was just wilfulness. I suppose I shall go to-morrow.'

'To-morrow ! I will not think of to-morrow,' he said. 'To-day is mine.'

'No, it is your country's. You ought to be at Galway. Perhaps we neither of us ought to be here. But here we are ! And was there ever a more beautiful afternoon ? I am hardly content to walk, I want to run.'

'We'll have a race,' he laughed.

'What a spectacle for your colleagues if they could see it ! Well, let us have a good long walk as it is to be our last ; and remember, I have forgotten all you said the last time we met.'

She led the way over a wooden bridge that crossed the river, and pointed to a ruined tower in the distance beyond green slopes broken by furze patches and outcropping limestone boulders.

‘This way,’ she called. ‘Any way; to-day would do. Everything is right.’

‘This,’ said Desmond, coming to her side, ‘is exactly the sort of day I would choose for a walk with the only possible comrade, if I were in love.’

‘But you are in love,’ she laughed. ‘At least you told me so.’

‘Oh, but you have forgotten all I told you last time we met. Well, I take you into my confidence and admit that I am in love, and that there are difficulties, barriers between me and the only possible lady, and I would choose a day like this, when everything round us seems to be rejoicing in its freedom, to hear that she loved me, and that there was no longer any barrier between us. Oh, I can picture her at my side, happy and free, freed by her own courage—a girl whose love would make a man’s heart beat quicker and his spirit grow stronger every time he remembered it.’

‘What a pretty picture, Mr. Desmond,’ she said, ‘but how amateurish. I see your couple too. She is the young man’s ideal maiden—no faults, except those perhaps committed for his sake: a few broken promises, for instance. And he is in love with her face or her figure; or her little feminine tricks have got hold of him, for I am sure he does not know her. And she does not love him, though perhaps she likes his admiration, and it pleases her to exercise the little temporary power which women have at such times over men. No, if she encourages him to think that she loves him she is a coquette, playing with him, making some use of him for her own schemes. Now, have I not shown you what an unsatisfactory couple you picture? How much pleasanter the relationship of mere friendship like yours and mine.’

She turned to him as she was saying the last words and gave him a look under her lashes which almost repealed their meaning.

'I wish to God it were three hundred years ago !' he said. 'I should not be talking to you about friendship ; I should carry you off.'

'What !' she laughed. 'Against my will ?'

'No, you would be glad to come ; I could then take the burden of freeing you on myself.'

'Forgive me for laughing,' she said, 'but it is so amusing to hear you, the serious statesman, the eminent leader of his country, talking like a boy. I really believe you would have tried to carry me off, and that I would have gone with you. But how different it all is now.'

'Why so different ?'

'Then you would have fought for me and taken me. Now you do nothing : you merely ask me to break a promise.'

'I am not speaking idly,' he replied, 'when I say that I would sacrifice my life or my whole career to win your love.'

'Ah, Mr. Desmond, you think so now, but are you not deceiving yourself ? Your life is more precious to you than any girl's love, your career is more to you than I could ever become. If I said to you, "I will break my pledge to another and marry you if you will abandon the service of your country and serve mine," would you do it ?'

'No !' he replied.

'Then you love your country better than you love me.'

'Yes, if you ask me to be untrue to it. No, if you help me to serve it. Oh yes, I should love you even better than my country if you joined me in loving it.'

It was well spoken, and his words seemed to touch her.

‘I know you could not be untrue to your country,’ she replied; ‘but might I not answer like you—might I not say when you ask me to be disloyal, “I love my honour better than I love you, but if you helped me to be true I might love you almost better than my honour”?’

‘It is beyond my strength,’ he pleaded. ‘I might do it if I felt that it was for your happiness,—if you loved the man you have promised to marry as I love my country, if he had claims on you such as Ireland has on me. But this is not so.’

‘No,’ she replied, ‘this is not so. And perhaps I should not be saying all this about my promise if I really wanted to break it. I believe I could do it without reproaching myself very much. If I loved you I would break it.’ She gave him a most engaging smile as she spoke, and added, ‘You see how heartless I am that I can talk so unconcernedly to you on a subject that I know you feel deeply about.’

‘I know you are not unkind,’ he said.

‘I shall show it by commanding you to talk about something else.’

‘I can think of nothing else.’

‘But I have told you I do not love you. I almost wish I did, but as it can’t be——’

‘Oh, but it might be,’ he cried. ‘Cannot I make you love me?’

‘Well, try,’ she answered, with provoking levity. ‘I give you leave.’

It was more difficult to make headway against this sort of defence than to meet direct opposition.

He was obliged to laugh at the ridiculous part she proposed for him.

'Like the poet, you feel the weight of too much liberty,' she suggested.

'No,' he replied, 'too little time. With more time I might do it.'

'You have the whole day.'

'And it might need my whole life. But I must make the best of my chances. I am thankful even for one day—and mind it must be a long day. I shall prolong it to the last minute.'

'And to-morrow when I have gone you will be sorry you asked for it, and you will be the angrier with me—perhaps I shall lose your friendship, even. I ought not to be with you now.'

'On my account, or because it would not meet with the approval of your friends?'

'I am thinking of you only,' she replied. 'I recognise no obligation. I claim my freedom still and I like exercising it. Am I not disgracefully frank when I tell you that it pleases me to let you make love to me, and that I like the sense of liberty it gives me. To you it may be reality; to me it is only play. Only play,' she repeated, as he was silent; 'and, dear friend, is it not therefore better that we should have no more of it?'

'You said you almost wished you loved me,' was his comment on her words.

'Did I say so? Perhaps I do wish it, but I have told you it is not possible.'

'You *do* wish it.'

'Does not the sceptic sometimes express in the same way a wish that he was a believer?'

'And it amuses you to play the part. But you do not wish to pain me,' he said in a changed tone,

‘and you wish I were less serious about it. Well, let me have something to remember. Treat me as your lover to-day, and I forgive you if to-morrow you go through it with another.’

‘Oh,’ she exclaimed, ‘could that give you any satisfaction?’

‘If I had you in my arms for a moment,’ he said passionately, ‘I could forget. I could forget that you did not love me.’

She was startled by his words, but did not rebuke him for them.

‘Do not ask me to repay true love with its counterfeit,’ she said, speaking for the first time with emotion. ‘I hate the part. I hate the unreality. I am tired of the pretence of love. If I loved you I should not hesitate. I should be afraid of nothing, I would give everything. Can you wish for loveless expressions of love?’

‘How can I look at you and think of anything else in the world but you?’

‘Oh,’ she cried, with a heightened colour, ‘what worthless thing do you ask for? I might give you real friendship, not without love, and it is nothing to you. It is not a woman’s love but her personal attractions that men desire. They have the same eye for the bride they lead to the altar as they had for the poor outcast girl who took their money. Oh, I have seen it. I have been made to feel it. When I was little more than a child the man who was married to my friend, to a girl who loved him with all her soul, made pretence of loving me. It is not love but the mockery of it that I see everywhere. And you, you whom I respect more than other men! You! but how can I reproach you!’

Her outburst of feeling gave him a gleam of

hope. Anything was better than her calm and amused acquiescence in his love-making.

'You told me I might try and make you love me,' he said earnestly. 'I want your help. If there is any hope, however little, tell me the way.'

'By not trying,' she answered. 'Leave all that you would say unsaid.'

'And then there might be a hope?'

'I cannot tell.'

'But to-morrow you are going.'

'I am misleading you. I do not know what I am saying.' Her tone showed real distress. 'I cannot give you any hope, and yet I do not know what to-morrow may bring with it. And to-morrow I shall not forget it if you obey my wish and say no more, no more to-day, of your love for me.'

'I obey,' he cried. 'Your lover is banished, and will not return until he is called. Your friend is here.'

If man conquers nature by obeying her it may at times be true that he conquers woman in the same way, and Desmond perceived that if there were a key to Corinna's heart it would have to be given to him by herself. He saw that her mind was in a ferment and that she was led into inconsistencies of thought and speech, now declaring that she was free and under no obligation, and a moment afterwards reproaching him for asking her to be untrue to her promise; now bidding him make love to her and saying that it pleased her that he should do so, and then declaring that the make-belief of love without the reality was hateful to her. At last she was moved, though he could not guess wherefore, and in her perturbation of spirit he found some comfort.

To turn from passionate speech to friendly conversation is not a light task ; but Desmond did his part creditably, and Corinna soon fell back into her manner of easy intimacy. The walk was somewhat curtailed ; they were on their homeward way before anything occurred to call their attention to the new understanding that had been established between them, and then it was but a momentary reminder.

Their path leapt a little brook over stepping-stones, and when they had reached the farther bank Desmond retained the hand he had taken to steady her in crossing. For a few seconds they walked thus, linked like happy lovers, and then instinctively turned to each other and laughed as at the detection of a forbidden thing. They separated at once, but for some time afterwards, when their talk was running easily on undisturbing topics, he felt the thrill of her touch, and she had not forgotten the clasp of his strong hand. Every time he looked at her he was tempted to speak the glowing words which her beauty and his love of her prompted, and the glances she gave him were not those to make his task of silence easier. He was helped in it, however, by a curious encounter which made an unwelcome diversion on their journey. From the shadow of some rocks, on a slope beside their path, a woman wrapped in a heavy hooded mantle suddenly appeared and addressed Desmond.

'Tis time I had another word with you, Michael Desmond,' she said ; and, turning to Corinna, added in a different tone, as though apologising for the intrusion, 'I beg her ladyship's pardon.'

Corinna looked at her curiously, and there was a moment's silence before Desmond spoke.

'Will you walk on?' he said to Corinna. 'I will join you in a minute or two.'

Coming to the country just at the time of Desmond's defence of Costello she had taken some interest in the case, but she did not know that this was the wife of the murdered man. As she walked on, however, she heard the name of Costello and guessed that the woman was Mary Rahilly. She neither looked back nor attempted to listen, but she heard enough to arouse her interest.

'My curse is on you and on your love, Michael Desmond!' were strange words to come from a peasant woman, and there was something uncanny in the whole scene which gave her a feeling of discomfort. When Desmond rejoined her she questioned him with serious eyes and noticed his face was pale.

'It is the wife of the man who was murdered, is it not?' she asked.

'Yes, poor woman. I fear her mind has become deranged by her trouble,' he answered. 'It is a very sad case.'

'They never discovered the murderer?' she asked.

'No,' he hesitated in replying.

'I suppose there is no doubt that Costello is innocent?'

'The jury heard the evidence and thought not.'

'And of course *you* had no doubt, as you defended him. What did the poor creature want with you? I heard her reproaching you.'

'She believes Costello to be guilty, and can't forgive me for defending him. The trouble has affected her mind.'

'And was he guilty? You may trust me,' she said.

'I will,' he said. 'I do not think he was innocent.'

'Oh, I can sympathise with her!' exclaimed Corinna.

'And I trust you also to understand how, believing this, I defended him. If he is guilty, the framers and supporters of the shameful laws which have produced the present condition of things are doubly guilty. He was a pawn I played for against the Government. Do I not trust you, even to risk your condemnation? To no one else in the world would I have spoken in this way.'

She rewarded him with a look which showed him he had done well in giving her his confidence.

'No,' she said, 'it is beyond me to understand the circumstances of the case, or to judge whether you were right or wrong in defending him, but I am glad you have trusted me. It shows me, at least, that you consider me worthy to be your friend, and I am proud of that. Poor soul! it has made her hate you, I suppose. It is a great responsibility to be in a position like yours. Well, now, let us forget the interruption and go on with our conversation. What were we talking of?'

'Talking of? I do not remember,' he answered. 'I know what I was thinking of. When the friend one can trust with every secret, and the girl one can love more than life itself is near, what other thought is possible?'

'Remember our compact,' she smiled. 'Here we are almost at home, and I reward you for good behaviour by inviting you to come and have tea with me.'

With the approach of evening a change had come over the scene. The wind had dropped; the clouds were massed in larger groups; their whiteness

had taken a touch of colour from the western light, and the shadows which had raced across the country now hardly moved. The steel-blue reaches of the river had become flashes of gold, and where there had been an azure haze on the mountains, the broken slopes had grown defined in sunlit crags and purple clefts. Corinna had no longer to battle with the wind. In exchange for its hunting call across the country it had left a whispered song in the woods, and where it had met her as a rough play-fellow it wooed her with gentle touches, and hardly stirred the tresses it had loosened in its sport.

CHAPTER XIII

DESMOND AND CORINNA—THE EVENING AND THE NIGHT

DESMOND had never looked at Duhallow Court without remembering the wrong which had been done to his family and his dream of regaining possession of the old property. Now, as he approached it with Corinna, his feelings were complicated by the reflection that its destined mistress was beside him, and for the moment the passion of his new and absorbing love became mingled with that of his traditional hatred. To prevent her becoming its mistress would be revenge incomparably sweeter than becoming its master himself. The winning of her love might even disarm hatred.

To save the half-mile walk to the wooden bridge a punt had been provided for crossing the river. Desmond untied it from its moorings, where Corinna had left it when she came to meet him earlier in the afternoon, and pushed her over. He noticed books lying on the cushions, and she explained that the punt had become her favourite reading place. 'And on a hot night,' she added, 'I should be tempted to exchange my room for it. Fancy the delight of falling asleep to the sound of those ripples!'

‘Which is your room?’ he asked, with a lover’s interest, as they walked towards the house.

She showed him its casement windows opening on the lawn. ‘The upstairs rooms are not quite ready,’ she told him, ‘and really I prefer this to any of them. You must come in and see the house.’

He shook his head.

‘Miss O’Brien told me you would not cross the threshold. Is that true? Will you not if I invite you?’

‘It is not your house,’ he said.

‘It will be mine after my marriage.’

His face hardened. ‘No,’ he answered; ‘I am sorry I cannot come in.’

‘Well, well! I must humour you, I suppose,’ said she, ‘and have tea sent out here. I will be back in a few minutes’; and turning her head as she went she added with a laugh, ‘I have no patience with superstitious traditions. I should like to make you come in.’

In her absence he had some minutes of perplexed reflection, and was unable to decide whether he was making progress with Corinna or not. He found it impossible to take the initiative: everything now depended on her. Her heart was like a fortress within which there were internal dissensions, but where the garrison might be united by an assault. In her request for a truce there was a gleam of hope, and discretion counselled him to obey her, while his love had grown to a compelling force whose expression could hardly be restrained. The great crisis in his fortunes had arrived: his whole public career seemed as nothing compared with issues now being decided.

Tea was brought out to the lawn, and Corinna, performing the duties of hostess, seemed to Desmond

to recede from the point of intimacy which she had touched with him during their walk. He sat on the ground bareheaded and said little while she chatted easily on trivial things in the manner of ladies who are at home in society. She was, nevertheless, keenly observant of him, and never had he pleased her more. His handsome resolute face had never looked so attractive to her. Intellect, nobility and courage, dear to her, were written on it. 'Why do I not love him?' she asked herself. 'Do I love him?' the question followed.

An English man-servant, one of the highly specialised species in which the maximum of deferential servility is combined with the minimum of loyalty and real respect, removed the tea-things, and afterwards remarked to his fellow-servants that 'there was a little game on.' Some similar reflections seem to have come to Andy Cronin, the gardener, who, commenting on Desmond's presence to his junior, summed up his views in the verse of a song :—

'Once I coorted an English lady,
She loved mate and I loved drink.
"Shqueeze me, Julia!" "Ah now, Thady!"
Thonomon daoil,¹ sir, what do you think?'

'Wisha then,' he added, 'good luck to him anny way, whatever divil's mischief he's after.'

Corinna, indeed, could not be unaware that her conduct in remaining alone at Duhallow and allowing the presence of Desmond was the subject of remark among the servants; and though she was quite indifferent to this, she was ready to resent its indication, as when she fancied she detected a significance in the man's tone when he appeared again to ask at what time she would dine and whether there would be company at dinner.

¹ Anam an diabhal = your soul to the devil.

‘And now, Mr. Desmond,’ she said, when the servant was gone, ‘I think I must send you away. I have to see my maid about my packing, and other arrangements to make about our going to-morrow. I will walk with you to the end of the garden. I am really sorry to say good-bye.’

He seemed disturbed and doubtful what to say. ‘You are really going to-morrow?’ he asked.

‘Yes, that is quite settled.’

‘Let me come back this evening and say good-bye; we cannot part like this.’

The look he gave her was more that of a man who claims a lover’s right than of one who pleads for a boon. She was driven to defence.

‘Oh,’ she exclaimed, with real emotion, ‘have I not spoken plainly enough? Will you not understand? It is not that I am thinking of my promise to marry Sir Henry Desmond. If I loved you I could forget that, and once or twice I have thought that you might make me forget it; but when you make love to me I remember it. I would have been glad if you could have won my love, and I told you that if there were any hope of this it would be by being my friend now and not my lover. You see I am reckless, and hardly know what I feel or what I wish, but I care at least enough for you to tell you the truth.’

Desmond saw that she was at last deeply moved. ‘Ah, if you were not going to-morrow!’ he said, looking at her as she stood with downcast eyes; ‘but can we part now?’

He feared that if she went—if she were once removed from his presence and restored to her surroundings in England—his last chance would be gone. He could not trust that spectral hope she

gave him. Now that her heart was touched, his own counselled him to make the utmost of his present opportunity. He preferred to risk the hope she had offered him rather than lose the chance of one more meeting.

‘Let me come back?’ he said in a low tone. ‘Give me this one evening.’

She looked up with a laugh and spoke again in her usual manner. ‘You prefer love-making to love, like other men,’ she said, with a little shrug of her shoulders. ‘You would like me to play a part. I will, if you like. I give you your choice. You will find me here by-and-by if you come, but I have warned you. To-day is always short, to-morrow may be very long. I hope you will not come.’

They were at the gate leading from the garden to the river path, and she gave him her hand.

‘Good-bye,’ she said. ‘Remember what I have said. Remember what I said about to-morrow, and do not come.’

But though her words were firm, the look she gave him as he turned to go contradicted them. It was almost an invitation.

Corinna’s thoughts were in the state of perturbation when reflection as to the position in which she found herself was impossible. She did not know what she wanted, there was no room for the exercise of her will, and she left her fortunes to the guidance of circumstances. Her fancies leapt to extremes. Now it seemed to her an absurdity to think of breaking off her engagement, when all arrangements for her marriage were made, on account of reports about Sir Henry which might not be true—and, even if true, showed him hardly worse than the majority of men, perhaps no worse than Michael

Desmond, whose absolute disregard of her honourable promise to another man itself condemned him ; then she re-read the letters she had received from Sir Henry and from her friend in Paris, and all her shame and anger were again aroused.

‘Ah,’ she thought, ‘if only I could love or were truly loved.’ Michael Desmond, she believed, had been attracted, like others before him, by her personal charms ; he had given no proof of a deeper love, and yet he was different from the others. He might yet prove his devotion : he might remember what she had said and not return that evening. Would he come ? She hardly doubted it. What if he stayed away ? His faith in her would disarm her against him—arm her against Sir Henry. And what if he came ? She would allow him to make love to her and feel that he had forfeited any claim to her love. The thought of it was disturbing, and yet it seemed to reassert the claims of the man she had promised to marry. If she were disloyal to him she would be the readier to forgive. ‘Oh,’ she cried in her heart, ‘I hope he will not come !’ and yet the more she thought of it the less she desired him to remain away.

After giving final instructions about their departure in the morning, Corinna went to her room to dress for dinner. She was glad to have her thoughts diverted for awhile, and listened patiently to her maid’s gossip, her comments on the Irish people, and her joyful anticipation of returning to a civilised world. Considering that she was to dine and perhaps spend the evening alone, Corinna was very thoughtful about her toilet, and though the dress she chose was a simple one, she knew the whole effect justified the admiration of her beauty which on special

occasions her maid was permitted to express. If she had aimed at kindling the fires of a cold heart rather than sobering the passion of a warm one, she could not have made a fitter preparation.

If when at a later hour she went out to meet her lover the night concealed the secrets of her care, it could not rob her of their charm: the beauty of the garden is still eloquent to one who knows the darkened pathways in which he walks, though its loveliness may be only revealed to him by a white blossom or a dewy fragrance.

The crescent moon was in the west, and a flash of its silver on rippled waters between dark trees attracted Corinna to the river-bank. Here she had expected to see Desmond, and though she had begged him not to come she would have been disappointed not to have found him awaiting her. Directly they met she became conscious that the relationship between them had undergone a change. In the isolation and mystery of the night the presence of the man who loved her and her permission of his presence had a new significance. Elemental emotions were stirred in her heart. For the first time she felt the dominating influence of a man; and, while her spirit rebelled, the new sensation gave her a thrill of pleasure. She knew full well the power which her charm as a woman had given her over men; she had read their weakness: now it was sweet to her to feel her own weakness. Neither of them had forgotten the last words which had passed between them in the afternoon, but they hardly alluded to them.

'You forgive me for coming?' was all he said; and her answer, 'I asked you not to come,' had no tone of reproach.

They were at the water's edge, and the punt lying

moored at their feet invited them to enter. Presently they were out on the stream drifting without guiding hand on the gentle current. The light of the stars and of the young moon seemed to be held in the shining river. Around it all the country lay dark. The wind had fallen, but now and then a whisper from the south-west stirred the overhanging alders or rustled among the sedges in the stream. The night was wooing Corinna. Desmond remained silent at her side, while she sat with her head turned from him watching the reflection of the stars in the water. Deep shadows enfolded the space of mirrored sky over which they floated, and below them the dark edge of the pool was a broken rim of silver light where the current found the shallows. The boat drifted among the sedges and was at rest ; little ripples lapped idly against its sides ; a tremor in the reeds answered a wandering breath of wind, so gentle that its presence was elsewhere unfelt. Desmond whispered Corinna's name, and the song of the stream was lovelier in her ears ; he took her hand, and the night seemed to tell her the secret of its beauty. She was no longer playing a part. When at last he drew her to him she had no wish to be released : the kiss in which his passion found expression won all the sweetness of her womanhood from answering lips.

No triumph Desmond had ever achieved uplifted his heart like that of the moments in which his love seemed victorious—no joy he had ever imagined compared with it. And she who had gloried in her independence found in surrender the freedom of spirit she had dreamed of.

The moon was low in the west ; its light no longer silvered the broken water of the shallows ; the stream

sang on its way unheeded. The lovers had no eyes for the light of heaven, nor ears for the music of earth. The mystery of life itself thrilled them in a touch. Words which had no power before he kissed her—dear names of love, sweet whispers that asked no reply, became eloquent now. He claimed her, claimed the right to serve and guard her, and in her silence he read her answer. His arm was beneath her, her head was on his shoulder ; she rested like a child in his embrace, and for long no thought of the passing time or care for the morrow disturbed their dream. At last she seemed to grow conscious of her surroundings and gently disengaged herself.

‘Oh!’ she said, ‘we have been dreaming. To-morrow it will all seem different.’

‘No,’ he answered her happily. ‘Reality is better than any dream.’

‘To-morrow it will be gone.’

‘To-morrow is ours too, and all the future.’

‘To-morrow!’ she repeated. ‘I cannot think of to-morrow.’

‘Dearest, you love me,’ he said.

‘I love you to-night,’ she said. ‘I am afraid to look forward.’

He drew her towards him again, but she did not respond.

‘It has grown dark,’ she said. ‘It must be late. We must go. Please row back, now, at once—I really mean it.’

He took an oar and pushed the boat out from the sedges.

The stars shone brighter than before on the darkened water, and now that the moonlight was gone the song of the stream seemed to have taken a deeper tone. A few strokes of the oars brought

them back to the garden landing-place. Desmond took Corinna's hand as she was getting out of the boat, and still kept it after they had landed.

'Well,' Corinna said, with an attempt to speak in her usual tone, 'I have given you the evening you asked for, but we must both try and forget it.'

'You love me,' he said firmly.

'I love you to-night.'

'You will love me always. Dearest, let me hear you say it. I know you are mine, but let me hear the words. Tell me that you will be my wife.'

'I cannot promise,' she replied. 'It is a dream. To-morrow it will all seem different.'

'I have no fear of to-morrow,' he said fervently. 'I stand at your side to help you. Are you thinking of difficulties in your way, of your engagement, of the man you do not love? It is my right now to protect you. Trust to me, darling, to safeguard you in every step you take. To-morrow and all the future are ours.'

'I cannot think to-night,' she replied, 'and I want you to leave me now.'

'I will come to you in the morning. Everything will be clear then. There are no difficulties left now you love me.'

They walked in silence, her hand still in his, along the dark shrubbery walks. One or two lights showed in the upper windows, but the rest of the house was dark.

'You must not come any farther,' she whispered, as they reached the edge of the lawn on to which her room opened. 'Good-night.'

He took her in his arms and held her close to him. He kissed her again, and the touch of her lips told him that his love was warmly returned ; and

he had a still sweeter assurance of it when, after she had left him and was about to enter her room, she ran back to him and hid herself a moment longer in his embrace. But when he was alone his feeling of love and triumph was troubled by a shade of misgiving, which grew darker the more he dwelt on the glowing memory of the past hour. 'To-morrow!' she had kept repeating the word with apprehension. 'I love you to-night,' she had told him twice, as though in doubt whether her heart was really his. 'Oh,' he thought, 'that I might have made the doubt impossible, that I might have carried her away with me to-night and made her my wife before there was time for her to hesitate.' A picture of old-world romantic elopements, the carriage waiting, the night journey, the solution of all difficulties by taking irretraceable steps, came to him; and he chafed to think of the possibility of meeting her in the morning in a changed mood and not wholly won.

He could not leave the place. In the darkness of the garden paths he walked to and fro watching the light in her window. Half an hour passed, and it still burned; all the rest of the house was dark. He drew nearer, irresistibly attracted. As long as her light remained he could not go. 'I love you to-night.' Her words haunted him ominously: the memory of her last kiss drove away his fears. At last the light vanished, and the whole house was dark and silent in the starlight. He remained for a minute longer, dreaming of her beauty hidden from him, and yet so near. The window opened, and Corinna stood, a dim white figure, on the threshold of the casement. The soft night air stirred in the trees, and through the silence the distant song of the stream came clear and sweet. Desmond's heart beat

violently. He breathed the beloved name, and Corinna gave a little start, but made no other movement. He came towards her and she did not stir.

'Why are you here?' Her words came almost inarticulately on a sudden check of her breath.

'I could not leave you,' he answered.

He drew closer, 'How can I leave you?' but she did not answer. 'I cannot leave you,' he whispered.

'And I cannot send you away,' she said.

She took a step back into her room and he was beside her. The threshold of the house he had sworn never to enter till it was his own was crossed, and the casement closed behind him. And still outside all was the same as it had been; the peacefulness of the starry night enfolded the dark country, and the little stream bore the music of its mountain song through hidden woodland ways.

CHAPTER XIV

DESMOND AND CORINNA—THE MORROW

NEXT morning, with plans matured in almost every detail for taking Corinna to Dublin and marrying her on the following day by special licence, Desmond rode over to Duhallow Court to see his bride and make final arrangements. He had to consult her wishes as to whether his mother should be taken into the secret and asked to accompany them ; and he also wished to obtain her consent to the performance of the ceremony with the rites of the Catholic Church. On neither point, however, was he greatly concerned. She was won : nothing could separate them. After the strain and suspense of the last week, his triumph gave him the spirits of a boy. He rode to the Court across country instead of by the road, taking every fence that came in his way out of sheer light-heartedness.

At the Court he was informed that Miss Temple-Cloud had not yet left her room. He requested that she might be informed that he had called, and received an answer that she would be happy to see him at twelve o'clock. The interval was longer than he liked on a day calling for prompt action, but he was glad to think she was resting, and he had business enough to occupy the intervening hours.

Rest was the last word that could apply to Corinna's condition. Though she remained in her room, she had risen some time before Desmond called. She had not slept. 'What have I done? Where is my freedom?' her troubled thought shaped itself in words at last. Love could have answered her gently; Love could have flushed her cheek with the whisper that her freedom was in the keeping of another; but in her heart Love had no resting-place. She was full of shame and humiliation. She despised herself, not in deference to any moral standard, but because of her weakness; because she had sacrificed her freedom, placed herself inextricably in the power of a man. She knew that Desmond desired nothing more ardently than to marry her, but the thought that she was now compelled to marry him gave her the feelings of a chained captive. She could only blame herself; but she rebelled against him. The man who had pressed his advantage to the uttermost limit was no longer for her the gallant gentleman who had wooed her under difficulties.

Her contempt was for herself rather than for him, but he had sunk in her eyes to that common level of his sex which had aroused her scorn; and now in her fall from her own high estimate she saw herself also on the despised level—nay, below it. The man remained free, but in allowing herself to be carried away by the passion of an hour she had lost her liberty. Love pleaded in vain. Once or twice a memory of the moonlit river and her lover as he had seemed to her when she was still free gave her thoughts a sudden gentleness; once or twice the memory of his passionate love and her surrender made her cheek paler; but the same

moan of despair, 'I have lost freedom, I have not found love,' persistently returned.

She dreaded her meeting with Desmond, and was incapable of foreseeing how she would act when the time came, but she braced herself for an interview in which her part would not be that of a woman whose will is no longer her own. She rang for her maid and completed her toilet with no less care than usual. She made a pretence of breakfasting, and opened and read her letters. One of these was from Sir Henry Desmond, composed in his customary vein of deferential gallantry; another from the Prime Minister in appreciative reply to a letter she had written to him describing her Irish surroundings. The latter closed with a hint of exalted future position, in a remark that her knowledge of the country might before long be of use to her if political events ran as he anticipated. A telegram from Sir Henry was brought to her while she was reading her letters. 'When may I expect you back? Shall I come for you?' was the message. She read the telegram, as she had read the letters, with indifference. The difficulties they would have presented to her yesterday were at least removed. There was no longer any occasion to balance advantages, or resent the unfaithfulness of the man she had promised to marry. She had freed herself from bonds which had become irksome, but she had done so by the sacrifice of liberty itself. Pride and shame strove within her; as the time for Desmond's arrival drew near, the only strength she felt came of the consciousness of a certain hardness of heart.

Though Michael Desmond felt the flush of victory and was uplifted with the joy of love, he was not wholly free from anxiety on Corinna's account. He

knew her to be brave of heart ; but he remembered that she was being tested severely, that the occasion was one to put a violent strain on a woman's strength. As he neared the house on his return he quickened his pace, longing to be with her and give her the comfort, if she needed it, of his presence—the strength of his strength. He doubted not that if she had suffered the pangs of self-reproach while alone, his love and the prospect of prompt action which lay before them would speedily restore her. He thanked Heaven he had won a bride whose head he could trust.

A moment's embarrassment, perhaps on his own part as well as on hers, to be instantly forgotten in each other's arms, was the picture Desmond saw of their meeting. When he first entered the room she was very pale and stood with downcast eyes, but as he hastened to her side, the look she lifted to him was so different from his expectation that he stopped almost abruptly.

'My darling,' he exclaimed, 'you are not well !'

Her look told him that she was suffering, and he was filled with tender compassion.

'My dear brave girl,' he said, 'I know what is troubling you.' He took her in his arms and she made neither response nor resistance.

For a moment the essential woman in Corinna was in willing captivity to the man to whom she had given herself, and it seemed an end of all difficulties to remain as a child in his safe keeping. It needed but the bond of true love between them to have allowed this solution, and to have brought comfort to her in a flow of tears. But love was not in her heart ; and while her weakness accepted the consola-

tion of his protecting arms, her spirit rebelled against his assumption of the right to protect her.

'Oh,' she cried, 'it is unbearable!'

He entirely misread the cause of her emotion, attributing it to the pain of her wounded sense of delicacy; and, again filled with compassionate love for her, he uttered words of endearment and reassurance.

'My wife,' he whispered, and the words stung her like a whip.

'Am I so abject,' she exclaimed with flashing eyes, 'am I so robbed of my freedom, that you treat me like this? Why do you assume that I am won, or that I need your protection?'

The brute fact that held the answer loomed before him incommunicably. She startled him by her manner and distressed him by her words, but he attributed both to the overwrought state of her nerves.

'Let us sit down and talk over our plans,' he said, drawing a chair towards her. 'All the path ahead of us is clear. I have everything arranged. Corinna, sweetheart, come! let me talk to you?'

She took no notice, but began pacing up and down the room. A flush had come to her cheeks; she held her head proudly; her eyes had a fire in them he had not seen before. Her beauty fascinated him. She seemed to have formed a resolution. She stopped after a few turns and spoke almost in her usual tone.

'After all,' she said, 'I *am* still free.'

'My darling, you are free as the mountain air,' he replied; 'and if I have not won your whole heart as your lover, I shall do so as your husband.'

She turned away impatiently. 'You persist in

taking it for granted that I am bound to marry you!

Every moment he was becoming more bewildered, more troubled by her strange attitude, but he still attributed it to her mental distress.

'You love me,' he said simply.

'Oh,' she cried, 'I should have loved you, but you have killed my love. Why did you come back yesterday evening when I begged you not to? If you had not come I should have loved you to-day. How can I love you when you have made me despise myself?'

For the first time he saw that he had to face a really serious situation. 'Despise *me*, if you must,' he said, 'but not yourself. You have trusted me as only a great-hearted woman could, and I am prouder of that trust than of anything in life.'

Her eyes softened. Tears were not far off. 'Leave me,' she said, 'it is better for me to be alone. I cannot talk of it any more.'

'All right,' he answered cheerfully; 'perhaps it is better. Believe me, dearest, I can understand you. I must forget some things you said that seemed unkind. You will forget them yourself. Promise me to rest, and do not ask me to leave you for long. Your trouble is mine, but it would be joy if you would let me bear it for you.' She was silent, and he continued, 'You have not slept. Promise me to rest until I return. Let me think and act for you. I will show you a path clear of difficulties. There is nothing like prompt action. Could you,' he added with a little laugh—'do you think you could get ready to go to Dublin this evening?'

'You mean, to marry you?' she said.

'Yes, the sooner the better To delay would be

to create difficulties—to make it necessary for you to end that engagement, to meet your own people, to invite comment. If we are married the whole thing is simple. I have run away with you and you with me,' he laughed, challenging her serious eyes. 'The world is amazed, our enemies are compelled to accept the situation, our friends are on our side, and we are free.'

It was, of course, the obvious step, and the step he had never doubted she could hesitate a moment about taking, and the amazing thing was that he should have to plead for its advantages with her.

'Corinna, for God's sake don't torture me !' he cried passionately. 'You do love me.'

She sank into a chair exhausted and covered her face with her hands. 'Leave me. Leave me now,' she cried.

He again reproached himself for not making sufficient allowance for her overwrought condition.

'Yes, dear, I will go,' he said. 'I will come back in the afternoon. I shall be miserable until I have seen you again.'

'No,' she begged, 'do not come this afternoon. Let me rest.'

He obeyed her reluctantly. 'To-morrow, then,' he said, 'to-morrow, early. To-morrow will make everything look different.'

They were almost the same words that she had said to him on the previous evening, but he did not notice it. His heart yearned to express its love. To have felt her arms about his neck, her tears on his cheek, would have sent him from her happy ; but she made no movement, and he asked her for nothing more. He bent over and kissed her forehead, and left her without any word of farewell.

Corinna went to her room and slept for a few hours. When she awoke there was no longer any trace of excitement about her. She had the determined look of one who saw difficulties before her, and was not dismayed by them. Her departure for England had previously been arranged for that day. She now gave instructions that everything was to be ready for the following morning, and after leaving orders that she would be at home to no one, she went out and walked along the garden-path by the river. She strove to think herself free. She determined that she would be free, that her liberty of action should be as unfettered as it had been twenty-four hours before. If she married Desmond it should not be until he had won her; and she was not won. She felt towards him as she imagined Ireland felt towards England. In the midst of her reflections she was surprised by the presence of a woman who seemed to have been waiting for her. She recognised Mary Rahilly.

‘I want a word with you, me lady,’ said she.

‘Very well,’ said Corinna, rather impatiently, but unable to escape her. ‘What can I do for you?’

‘The man that brought trouble on one woman will bring trouble on another. The man that forgot the love of one woman will forget the love of another,’ she said ominously.

Corinna understood that the murder of her husband had affected her reason, and let her go on.

‘I’m sorry to be here, Miss!’

Corinna looked at her with pitying interest. She was struck by the refinement of her voice and features. A suffering woman always appealed to her.

'I should like to help you if you are in trouble,' she said.

'May God reward your goodness,' replied the woman; 'but 't isn't to ask your help I'm here, but to warn you of danger.'

Corinna noticed that there was no sign of excitement or madness about her. She spoke as from deep conviction.

'You know that 'tis Michael Desmond I'm spakin' of,' she continued; 'and I'm here to warn you that my curse is on him and on his love.'

'That is nothing to me,' said Corinna with an involuntary shiver.

'He's coortin' you, they do be sayin', and you've listened to his coortship.'

Corinna stepped past her. 'Will you be good enough to leave me?' she said.

'I'll lave you when I've said what I came hither to say,' said the woman, following her, 'and 'twill not take long.' She stood in the path in front of Corinna. 'My curse is upon him,' she repeated solemnly, 'and 'tis right you should know it before it falls on yourself. 'Tis not for the wrong he did meself. He did me that wrong when I was a girrl no older than you are, and he called it love, and, God forgive me, I was proud of it.' Corinna could not choose but listen. 'And a good man married me and gave me an honest name, and was murdered in cold blood. And Michael Desmond defended the man that murdered him.' She spoke in low, even tones full of intense feeling. 'I laid me curse on him for that.'

Corinna struggled against a fascination of horror which the woman's words and manner threw about her. 'If you are speaking the truth—if this is the

way you seek revenge,' she began — 'no, you are not speaking the truth.'

'I have no more to say, Miss ; I came hither to warn you. When Michael Desmond was a young man with a clanner soul than he has now, I held him in my arms as maybe you think to hold him, and he spoke words to me that maybe he'll spake to you ; but the man that forgets one woman will forget another, and the curse that I laid on him and his love will stay with him.'

She turned as she finished speaking and walked slowly away. A fit of trembling came over Corinna as she went back to the house. The interview completed her sense of humiliation. She felt herself on the level of the woman who could also speak of Desmond as a lover. Her intuitive resentment of the relationship existing between man and woman was aroused to active rebellion ; and, to her, Desmond stood for his sex. She knew that in the eyes of the world—if the world could have seen—she had placed herself in his power ; and this fact intensified her passion to be free, determined her to assert her freedom in defiance of what had happened. In the eyes of the world she had yesterday been under an obligation to marry Sir Henry Desmond : to-day she was forbidden to marry him and compelled to marry Michael Desmond. She repudiated both judgments. To marry Sir Henry now might be abhorrent to herself, but she strove to think that she was in no way debarred from doing so. He had been disloyal to her, she to him. She could now meet him on equal terms : she claimed that woman should be judged by the same moral standard as man. But if, in the progress of time, this common standard should peradventure be

established, it will assuredly be arrived at by the winning of man to a higher ideal, not by the permission to woman of a lower. In her desperate revolt Corinna was fighting, not against the world, but against nature, against all that was best in her own heart.

In her present state of emotional ferment her rebellion against the man in whose power she had placed herself was the one impelling force. She decided on immediate action, and made instant preparation for her departure to England by the mail train to Dublin that evening. Before leaving she wrote a line to Desmond, which she afterwards placed in the post herself. A longer letter which she had first written displeased her and was destroyed. What she wrote was merely this :—

It is better for us not to meet. I am leaving to-night for England on my way to friends in France. Do not follow me.—C. T.-C.

The same train by which Desmond had counted on taking his bride to Dublin bore her away from him.

He received Corinna's communication next morning, and after his first feelings of amazement and mortification had come and gone, he was less disturbed by her action than might have been expected. It was clear to him that she had undergone a severe emotional strain which had upset her habitual cool-headed judgment, and he even admitted that it might be a good thing that she should have time to recover before she came to him as his wife. A week's absence and reflection would make her feel how entirely she must rely on him, and he was so thoroughly in love with her that he was prepared

to submit to the disappointment of a short postponement for the recompense of reunion with a happy bride.

He decided to obey her wish and neither follow nor attempt to communicate with her until she wrote to him. He understood her well enough to know that she had rejoiced in her freedom, and perhaps resented the compulsion under which she was placed to marry him. It was for him, as far as might be possible, to make her forget the compulsion, and to treat her lightest wish as a command.

For the first few days after she left his task of patient waiting was not difficult. He plunged into work, devoting himself to arrears of correspondence and details of political organisation. Once or twice he was on the point of telling his mother of his engagement to Miss Temple-Cloud, but he did not do so. As the days passed without bringing him a letter, he became restless. Political work called him to Dublin, but he was afraid to leave home lest a message from Corinna should come for him in his absence. He invited two of his colleagues to Duhallow, and tried to concentrate his thoughts on business while he listened for the knock at the door which might announce a letter or a telegram.

At the end of the week the necessity for action of some sort became imperative. If he had known where Corinna was, he would have gone to her in spite of her injunction. The only person he could think of as likely to give him her address was the Prime Minister. He wrote and received no direct answer, but, after three days' further waiting, he read a startling paragraph in the *Irish Times* which explained the Prime Minister's silence, and contained a statement which, though incredible, compelled his

alarm. Under the heading of 'Indisposition of the Prime Minister' it stated that he had been ordered to rest before the autumn session, and that Lord Champfleure had placed his steam yacht, *Panthea*, at his service. After mentioning some of the engagements which would now have to be cancelled, the paragraph concluded :—

Much disappointment is felt in society circles at the necessity for abandoning the brilliant gathering which had been arranged to take place at Wilton Towers on the occasion of the marriage of Sir Henry Desmond with the niece of the Prime Minister. We understand that the marriage will now take place immediately, and that the ceremony will be private. Sir Henry Desmond and his bride are expected to join the Prime Minister on the *Panthea* during their honeymoon.

This was matter about which, whether it were true or false, thought was impossible : action was imperative. Desmond left home at once, and arrived in England next morning.

Again it was the newspaper that chronicled his fortune. On the front page of the *Times* his own name caught his eye, and he read this :—

On the 12th instant, at the parish church of Wyck St. Mary, by the Rev. Cecil Down Ampney, rector, Sir Henry Desmond, Bart., M.P., of Wyck House, Surrey, and Duhallow Court, Co. Cork, to Corinna, only daughter of Colonel and Mrs. Temple-Cloud.

CHAPTER XV

THE OPENING OF THE BALLYVODRA HOTEL

IT was not till the early summer of the following year that Kathleen O'Brien was able to complete the arrangements for opening her hotel. On first hearing of the scheme the neighbourhood had been incredulous, and having had its laugh it took a genuine interest, and commended the pluck of the venture. But no goodwill of friends or neighbours could heal the wound which had been dealt to the family pride. Every member of the household, even Kathleen, in spite of her assumed indifference to appearances, felt it, and Mr. O'Brien more than any of them. Against pride he had been preaching and warning his family for years, without knowing how much of it there was in his own heart. Now, the picture of himself, the head of his branch of the family, the descendant of princes of the land, as an innkeeper was bitter to contemplate.

Jack, after having the situation made very clear to him, came loyally to his sister's aid, but he felt the humiliation keenly, and avoided his old associates, especially the young English officers at the neighbouring barracks. Miss Bridget and Miss Honora spent more time than formerly in the privacy of their own rooms, and refused the invitations they continued to

receive to parties in the neighbourhood. They professed themselves ready to help, and showed signs of excitement as the time for the opening of the hotel drew near. Jem, the second boy, had gone out to Connor Desmond's friend in Canada, and Dan, who went daily to a school in Mallow, was too young to be considered ; but Kathleen had a task in managing the other members of her family, and keeping up their spirits, which, added to her labours in carrying through her scheme, called for all her tact and strength.

It would have taken a far larger sum than Kathleen had at her disposal to repair the neglect of years in the old place, and also provide for the necessary alterations to the house for the reception of guests ; but there were many signs of improvement. The rusty entrance gates had received a coat of paint, and on the roof of the lodge slates covered the holes which had been protected by a canvas rick cover. Weeds and moss had been removed from the avenue, and a wire fence had been erected to keep the cattle from the shrubberies surrounding the house. In the kitchen garden, a winter's work had been devoted to the reclamation of the jungle into which it had degenerated ; the stables and outbuildings had been patched up, and the big doors between the courtyard and the farmyard were locked to prevent the invasion of the precincts of the house by pigs and poultry. Externally there was not much change in the house itself, other than the glazing of windows, the painting of woodwork, and the introduction of a lamp above the hall door on which appeared the words, 'The Ballyvodra Hotel.' Miss Honora had suggested 'The Hotel Ballyvodra' as being more fashionable, but had received no support. The

entrance was further embellished by the smart appearance of the two old naval guns which stood on either side of the door. The rust had been removed, and Sisk, the painter, had illuminated them with all the colours he possessed. Within, the change was considerable. Partitioned from the hall was a glass structure with a window labelled Office in red letters, and a little counter in front of it. The dining-room had been enlarged by making an opening into a disused room beyond it, and, in addition to the old table which stood in its accustomed place, a number of smaller ones had been placed round the walls. The holes in the drawing-room floor had been mended, and a new carpet and some new chairs purchased. The old school-room was fitted up as a smoking-room, and the fragrant chamber adjoining, half still-room, half store-room, became the bar. The disused bedrooms were furnished, rather barely, and they were all numbered. Everything was ready for the reception of at least twenty guests to begin with, and a plan devised for increasing the accommodation if success should require it. A wing of the house which contained rooms for lumber, stored apples, wool, old harness, and other accumulation was cleaned, plainly furnished, and shut off from the rest of the building for the use of the family, with a private entrance into the walled garden. The alterations had been carried out with economy, and Kathleen's architect had proved his devotion to his client by keeping the cost under the estimate.

As to the staff, the old servants were retained. Carmody became head waiter, with Con Callaghan, the gardener's son, usually called Coneen Cal to distinguish him from his parent, and two maids as his assistants. Carmody had a new suit of clothes, and

contemplated with well-feigned admiration the figure of his junior in his own discarded coat, the tails of which came near to touching the ground in its new position. But the most striking thing in the way of apparel was one of Mr. O'Brien's old hunting-coats, slightly altered for the wear of Matthew Corbett, the boots. Kathleen was a little doubtful as to his capacity for the post, but at one time of his life he had been an officer's servant and she hoped for the best. She had determined to rely on her own people as much as possible, and the only stranger in the establishment was Miss Copley, the book-keeper, who was English, and had already had some hotel experience. An omnibus was the chief addition to the outdoor equipment. It was an expensive item, but as the station was four miles away it was a necessity. Of horses there were already enough on the place for any ordinary work that might be expected, and no one in the country knew better than Jack O'Brien where to find others when they were wanted.

On the morning of the opening of the hotel Kathleen received a letter saying that a party of six people going to Killarney desired accommodation at the Ballyvodra Hotel, and would arrive at Mallow from Dublin in the evening at five o'clock. She had hardly ventured to hope for guests on the first day, and was much elated. As it was possible there might also be chance comers who had not written, preparations were made and dinner ordered for ten. As the time drew near for the departure of the omnibus to meet the train, Kathleen made a final inspection of the arrangements like a general surveying the disposition of his troops before an engagement. Mrs. Irwin, the cook, was anxious

to make a good first impression, and the dinner in preparation perhaps erred on the side of profusion. She was somewhat alarmed at her mistress's warning as to the possible protraction of the meal.

'You see, Mrs. Irwin,' she said, 'in a hotel people are not always punctual, and unless you are very careful, things might be spoilt by being kept waiting.'

'Oh thin, indeed, I'd tatch them manners, Miss, at the bignin', and lave them that's late take their shance,' said Mrs. Irwin.

'But the train might be late. Besides, we have to get a good name for making them comfortable. I have a notice up saying, "Dinner, seven-thirty, punctually," and I hope they'll take notice of it.'

The dining-room looked bright with its tables covered with snow-white linen, and decorated with bunches of fragrant spring flowers. The department of floral decoration had been given to Miss Bridget—Miss Honora, being the stronger, having embraced the more laborious duty of taking charge of and issuing stores. In spite of the injury which their feelings had sustained, they derived some secret happiness from the share they were taking in assisting the scheme.

The whole establishment turned out to see the omnibus start for the station. It was drawn by a pair of very smart grey horses, and David Condon, the coachman, was a proud man as he drove through the great arch of the courtyard, and heard the wheels crunch the newly laid gravel of the drive in front of the hall door. Corbett, the boots, in his pink hunting-coat, was beside him on the box and shared his glory. Kathleen, standing on the doorstep, gave her final instructions to Corbett.

'Be on the platform when the train comes in,' she said, 'and ask every one who gets out if it's for the Ballyvodra Hotel they are.'

'And if there's too much luggage for you,' said Jack to the coachman, 'put the heavy things on the ass-cart. Quinlan will be there with it in front of you.'

A cheer from a group of labourers and servants collected under the archway signalled the departure, which was watched furtively but not without interest by Mr. O'Brien from the shubbery.

As he had plenty of time, David Condon could not resist the temptation of going a little out of his way and driving through the village of Duhallow. Here the omnibus attracted all the attention he had anticipated. Lord Shandon himself had nothing so imposing, and David had to receive a running fire of interrogation and chaff. At Riordan's public-house, where he stopped to have a glass of porter in honour of the occasion, a small crowd collected.

'Tis a grand turn-out, David,' said one. 'All ye want now is poshtillions.'

'Indeed and maybe before long we'll have thim too, with the help o' God,' said Corbett.

'And there's company comin' to ye already, and 'tis only to-day the hot-tel's open?'

'Phaix,' replied David, 'there's no knowin' how we'll dale wid them all. They're just tumbling over aich other. We have two ass-carts sint on in front to bring the heavy luggage.'

'Wisha then, that's good news! 'Twill be bring-ing thrade into the counthry.'

'Will they be wantin' a valley at the hotel?' asked Pat Considine, a ragged individual who was accompanied by his wife, who carried a baby on her

back, and several children ; ' because I've a thrifle of leisure just now.'

At this period of the year, before the potatoes in his little patch of garden were ready for digging, he made professional rounds as a candidate for alms through the county.

' For shame, Pat Considine,' cried one of the group. ' Where's your pride, man, to be thinkin' of enlisting for a servant? What'd your family think of you ?'

' What time 'll ye be back from Mallow station wid the company ?' asked another.

' Twill be about half-past six or from that to seven,' replied David.

' Some of us 'll be round to welcome ye,' said the speaker.

' And indeed we will,' added several others.

' 'Tis a great day !' and ' Did I iver think I'd live to see an O'Brien of Ballyvodra come to this ?' ' They say 'tis Miss Kathleen's doin', God bless her,' and ' Good luck to thim anny way, for they niver turned the poor man away from their door,' and ' Look out on the platform for me aunt, Mrs. Baymish of Tralee, she have a shweet of rooms taken,' were some of the comments, interspersed with cheers, as David picked up his reins and drove off.

The omnibus was late on its return, and it was dark before the long-expected sound of wheels was heard in the avenue. Lights shone in all the windows of the house, and at the open door Kathleen awaited her guests. A considerable crowd, composed partly of farm-labourers and others engaged at Ballyvodra, and partly of sympathetic visitors from the neighbourhood, had gathered in front of the house. A little

group surrounded one of the guns which had been removed a short way from the house, and Dan, who had caught the spirit of the occasion, and appeared to be acting as battery commander, was superintending the priming of the touch-hole. The omnibus was driven up the avenue at a gallop; and as it pulled up at the door, the loud report of the cannon, the firing of which was happily unattended with injury to any one, and a burst of cheering, signalled the fact that the hotel was open and the first guests had arrived.

But where were the guests who, according to Condon, were tumbling over each other to get admission? Where was the party Kathleen was expecting from Dublin? Corbett, not entirely sober, dropped from the box and threw open the omnibus door. One old gentleman was the only occupant. As he alighted a great cheer greeted him, and he stood on the steps contemplating the strange scene with a look of amusement.

‘Gentlemen!’ he said, addressing the shadowy crowd, ‘gentlemen, and perhaps I may add, ladies! I am much obliged to you for your welcome, though I am afraid it is due to some mistake. If, as I am afraid, you mistake me for one of your legislators, thank God you are wrong. I appreciate your kindness; but if you have done me the honour because I am the first guest to arrive, I shall be glad to celebrate the occasion by sending you a barrel of porter into the yard.’

He turned round amidst renewed cheers, and was greeted by his hostess.

‘What? Mr. Barrington!’ she exclaimed.

‘Yes, my dear young lady, and very proud of the fact that I’m your first guest.’

'Indeed, you're a welcome one.'

'And a very hungry one.'

'Oh,' she laughed, 'we can relieve that. We have dinner prepared for ten, and you're alone. But this luggage must belong to the party I expected,' she added, as trunk after trunk was brought into the hall.

'It's all mine,' he replied. 'You see, I'm come prepared to make a good long stay. That is my intention. I am tired of wandering.'

Kathleen was quick to perceive the advantage of having a good permanent guest, and her disappointment at the non-arrival of her party entirely vanished.

'Any room will do for me to-night,' said Mr. Barrington; 'but as I am hoping to make my home here for the present I will ask you to let me look round to-morrow and choose my rooms. I shall want a private sitting-room, if I can have one, as well as a bedroom. And if you haven't one ready,' he added, noticing a look of perplexity on Kathleen's face, 'I daresay we can fix up one of the bedrooms. I have some odds and ends of cabinets and bookcases and things that would furnish it. Well, we'll leave all that till to-morrow.'

Kathleen rang the bell for the chambermaid, and assumed a business-like air. 'Take this gentleman to number three, Mary,' she said; and turning to Corbett, 'Mr. Barrington will show you the things he will require in his room; the rest can stay in the hall till to-morrow.'

The old man looked at her with quiet amusement. 'I expect you would like me to register my name,' he said, noticing the new visitor's book which lay on the office counter. 'I'll do it by-and-by, but I

can't promise you any poetry. Yes, it all looks very homely and pleasant. I'm glad I came.'

After waiting until her guest was comfortably occupied with his dinner, attended by Carmody and Coneen Cal, Kathleen joined her family in their private room. The usual babel of voices met her ear : all were talking, none were listening.

'What's this they're telling me,' cried Mr. O'Brien, 'that 'tis Barrington, Mrs. Desmond's brother, you have here? A neighbour! He's welcome as a friend and a guest, but how can we take his money? Not a penny of it will I have. With strangers 'tis different, but I can't do it with friends. I'll go tell him myself.'

'Indeed, father,' said Kathleen, 'you'll do no such thing. He's just the sort of guest we want, and he's come to stay. You don't mind selling your sheep to a neighbour,' she laughed, 'so you must not object to my selling my mutton after it's cooked.'

'There 'll be plenty for him,' said Jack. 'They have the best part of a sheep cooked for this party that didn't come.'

'Couldn't we have the law of them,' suggested Dan.

'Listen to that for noise,' exclaimed Mr. O'Brien, who was in an excited mood. 'There's half the parish collected outside in the yard.'

'And the barn cleared for dancing,' said Dan.

'All the idle rascals in the village are over to see what we're doing, and eat and drink at my expense. By the powers,' he said, rising, 'I'll have every mother's son of them out of the place in two minutes!'

'You must let them alone to-night, father,' said Kathleen. 'It's kindness brought them over, and 'twould be unlucky to turn them away on our first

night. And 'tisn't our porter they're drinking. Mr. Barrington ordered it for them, and 'tis good for business.'

Miss Bridget and Miss Honora exchanged glances of horror at Kathleen's degeneracy.

Coneen Cal knocked at the door and thrust in his head. 'A bottle of number three and a bottle of number tin, Miss,' he said. 'He's atin' very hearty,' he added in a congratulatory tone.

The boys received this information with a shout of laughter, and Kathleen went to the store-room where she kept the supply of wine she had laid in. She had obtained it from a wine-merchant in Cork without the advice of a male friend, and was a little anxious how it would turn out ; but Connor Desmond had assured her that her guests would not pay for expensive wine, and that ninety-nine out of every hundred would not know it if it were given to them. What little remained in Mr. O'Brien's cellar had not been put on the list.

She returned to find her family in a heated discussion as to whether Mr. Barrington ought to be treated as a stranger and left alone, or if it would be right to show him some personal attention—perhaps ask him to join the family party after dinner.

'I don't know where I am,' said Mr. O'Brien. 'I don't like to be leaving him alone there by himself with no one to speak to and entertain him. And how can I show hospitality to a man who is paying for his own bed and board.'

'Indeed, he will probably be feeling lonesome,' said Miss Bridget.

'Let him alone,' said Jack ; 'he'll go to sleep after dinner.'

'Perhaps,' said Kathleen slyly, 'Aunt Bridget

might go and sit with him in the drawing-room for a while.'

'My dear !' exclaimed Miss Bridget ; 'it would be most improper.'

Coneen Cal knocked again, and showed an anxious face.

'A bottle of twelve and a bottle of twenty-two, Miss.'

'Begad, he's not doing badly,' Jack laughed as Kathleen went out. 'We shall have to carry him to bed if this goes on ; but I suppose it's all good for business, as Kathleen says. Now, how much a bottle do you net on that stuff ?' he asked her as she came back.

'Really, Jack, you put things very—well, not very delicately,' said Miss Honora. 'I hope there's nothing the matter, Kathleen,' she added, noticing a look of distress on her niece's face.

'I'm afraid Mr. Barrington is very particular about his wine,' she answered. 'Of course hotel wines are not for connoisseurs.'

Her suspicion was confirmed a few minutes later by Carmody himself, who appeared at the door with an angry countenance.

'Me heart is broke with him, Miss,' he cried. "'Number three ! What's that you call it," says he, "St. Julien ? Red ink," says he. "Number tin ! Chateau Lafitte ? Chateau Baymish," says he. "Number twelve ! Bone, is it ?" says he, "or syrup of cough-drops ? I'll try once more," says he, "and lave you choose it yourself." What 'll we give him, Miss ?'

'Upon my word, I like his damn cheek,' said Jack.

'Sure he's paying for it,' said Dan.

Mr. O'Brien, with a memory of the days when his

cellar and his father's before him had had an honourable name, winced. He showed no sign of offence at Mr. Barrington's criticism, but gave an order without consulting Kathleen.

'Go into the cellar and get up one of the bottles of port, Carmody,' he said, 'and take it to Mr. Barrington with my compliments.'

'That won't pay, sir,' said Dan cheekily as Carmody left the room.

'Hold your tongue, sir,' cried his father. 'Will I sit down and see a neighbour poisoned in me own house. Be off now and get your lessons prepared.'

Dan departed, not to prepare lessons, but to join the revellers in the barn, and Jack went to smoke and read the *Cork Constitution* in the room he had fitted up for himself above the coach-house.

Meanwhile Mr. Barrington, in spite of his failure to find a wine he could drink, was feeling very comfortable and pleased with his new surroundings. The dinner had been excellent; it would be little hardship to drink whisky for a night or two, and it would be easy to get in some wine for himself. He did not expect much from Carmody's new adventure to the cellar, and he did not notice the look of pride and dignity on the old butler's face as he returned with the bottle of port which he had carefully decanted. Mr. Barrington poured out a glass and sipped it rather casually; he repeated the operation critically; he then held up the glass to the light, and put it to his lips almost apologetically.

'Waiter,' said he. 'See, what's your name? I like to call a man by his name.'

'Carmody, sir.'

Mr. Barrington poured out another glass of port, and, after receiving its confirmatory evidence of an

opinion he almost feared might have been too hasty, he said, 'Carmody, have you much of that stuff?'

'Enough to float a ship,' replied Carmody, 'multiplying in his mind's eye the few dozens that remained, for the honour of his master's cellar.'

'How long have you had it here?'

'Indeed, then, 'twas there before I can remember it.'

'It's 'forty-seven.'

'Indeed, 'tis all that then, thank God.'

'I don't see it in the list,' he said, turning over the leaves.

'Oh sure, it isn't there at all, sir, 'tis our private drinkin'. And the masther tould me to bring it with his compliments.'

Mr. Barrington gave a sigh of disappointment. He had seen a vista before him of evenings coloured by that wine.

'Please convey my best thanks to Mr. O'Brien,' he said, and after a moment's reflection added, 'Tell him he would add to my gratitude if he would join me in drinking it.'

To receive an invitation under his own roof was a curious experience to Mr. O'Brien. His pride made it difficult for him to accept it; his feeling of hospitality compelled him to consider his guest. Kathleen saw his discomfort, and suggested that Mr. Barrington should be asked to join their party. Carmody was despatched with the message, and returned accompanied by Mr. Barrington.

Mr. O'Brien and he had not met before, and Kathleen introduced them.

'You would need, sir, to be in my unhappy position—childless and homeless—to understand how much I appreciate your kindness and your welcome.'

Mr. Barrington shook hands with his host warmly, his face shining with geniality and well-being.

'My sisters,' said Mr. O'Brien; and the ladies half rose and bowed with a mixture of coyness and dignity. Mr. Barrington settled himself in an arm-chair which was indicated to him, and noticed with satisfaction that Carmody had brought in the decanter of port. He was so entirely at his ease that he relieved the others from any sense of constraint.

'Yes,' he said, 'after spending the best years of one's life in money-getting, after knocking about the world as I have done, one feels the want of a home. I'd give all I possess to sit at my own hearth, and see the faces of my children round me.'

Miss Bridget and Miss Honora gave approving murmurs to this sentiment. Poor motherly souls! they, too, often had visions of hearth and children of their own, sweeter than any picture of wealth or exalted position.

'I'm sixty,' continued Mr. Barrington. 'It's forty years since my poor father—do you remember him, Mr. O'Brien?'

'Indeed I do. Many a time when I was a lad I saw him in the hunting field.'

'He gave me a hundred pounds to fight the world with. Well, I fought the world in quite a friendly way—no bad feeling on either side—and came out of it all right.'

'You did the right thing, sir, not a doubt of it.'

'And here I am in Ireland again, and glad to be back too. No other country seems like home.'

'Home!' echoed Mr. O'Brien. 'Tis hard work for some of us to keep our home here now.'

Miss Bridget exchanged glances with her sister as

though to say, 'Now William is off on one of his tirades.'

'Tis a country, sir, in which there's no justice left. Look at me own case and the case of half the other landlords in Ireland, robbed of our rents and abused by the robbers. "Down with landlordism," says any jackass of a fellow on a platform, and every lazy ruffian in the crowd shouts and thinks himself a patriot. And English politicians call these howlings "the bitter cry of an oppressed people," to suit their own purposes. Believe you me, sir, a judgment will fall on the country, and on the man that made Jeroboam to sin.'

'Israel!' Miss Honora gently corrected her brother.

'And if you want the man's name,' said Mr. O'Brien, 'tis Michael Desmond.'

'My nephew,' Mr. Barrington smiled.

'Your nephew! I forgot it. I owe you an apology, though 'tis truth I speak,' Mr. O'Brien said in some confusion.

'And I heartily agree with you, sir. No one can detest my nephew's views more thoroughly than I do.' Mr. Barrington filled his glass, and insisted on his host joining him in finishing the bottle.

'I've made my money and prospered under the British flag, and I mean to support it,' he said. 'What's this Home Rule but a step towards separation? Read their speeches, read Michael Desmond's speeches in America. But he's wise enough to know that physical force would be madness, and he's holding the Clan-na-Gael in check, and making use of them all the while. He could put a stop to agrarian crime too, but it suits his purpose to let it continue.'

'You have it,' cried Mr. O'Brien, 'you have it to a T.'

There was a look of hostility in Kathleen's eyes, and she seemed about to speak.

'I can't help admiring the fellow too,' Mr. Barrington continued. 'He's turned the Irish parliamentary rabble into a compact force, he's played the two great English parties off against one another, he's either frightened or converted their most influential statesmen, and finally he gets his views adopted as part of the Liberal programme. What did England care for Home Rule five years ago? But there's no knowing what infernal folly an English mob's capable of when it ceases to be purely selfish. They'll weep about Bulgarian atrocities when they ought to be rebuilding their fleet, and they'll yell for the rights of Irishmen and be disloyal when they ought to be federating their Empire.'

'Now you have it,' said Mr. O'Brien, who, however, was not entirely clear as to Mr. Barrington's meaning. 'You have it to a T, sir.'

'Well, they've lost one general election on Home Rule, but they're getting stronger every day. If Michael can hold his band of rascals together solid, I believe he'll have his way. He's an extraordinary fellow. By the way, d'ye know my nephew Connor?'

'Oh yes, very well,' all answered except Kathleen. 'From his boyhood.'

'What an awful noise they're making outside,' said Miss Bridget. 'Ought it not to be stopped, William?'

''Tis our friend's barrel of porter,' he replied. 'Let 'em alone.'

'Connor's the fellow I like,' Mr. Barrington went

on, growing more confidential under the influence of the port. 'He has as good a head as Michael, and a damn—excuse me, ladies, that's a word I learnt in the colonies—and a much better heart ; but, like the rest of them, he has fallen under the spell of Michael's influence. If he'd give me a chance I'd make him my heir, but no money of mine is going to rebels. My sister has a good deal to answer for. I'm sorry about Connor. With my money he could go a long way, and he's a fine lad and as straight as a gun barrel. But Michael ! he's got no conscience. He's utterly unscrupulous. He sees his object, and goes for it without consideration for friend or enemy. To gain his ends there's no cruel or mean thing he wouldn't do.'

'That's not true,' Kathleen said with flushed cheeks, 'and it's not fair.' She rose and left the room.

'What have I done now?' said Mr. Barrington in consternation. 'I wouldn't offend that young lady for anything.'

'Oh, 'tis nothing, 'tis nothing,' Mr. O'Brien reassured him. 'I agree with everything you said, but my daughter's a little touchy on the subject. Desmond saved her life when she was a child, and she has never forgotten it. They have remained friends. I don't forget it either,' he added.

At this moment Miss Copley, the English lady Kathleen had engaged as book-keeper, burst into the room with a white and terror-struck face.

'Oh,' she cried, 'come and stop them, they're murdering each other. There's blood flowing. Quick, it's a terrible scene.'

The opened door let in the sounds of conflict—shouts, groans, cheers, mingled with the wail of bagpipes.

'Oh, they're only amusing themselves,' said Mr. O'Brien, rising leisurely.

'They're killing each other,' the young lady cried excitedly, 'and Master Dan's loading the cannon. I saw him ramming it. For heaven's sake, Mr. O'Brien, come and stop it.'

'See what your barrel of porter has to answer for,' laughed Mr. O'Brien, as he went out followed by his guest.

In the dim light of stable lanterns and the embers of a dying bonfire, a dark mass of men armed with sticks surged and struggled. There seemed to be no method in the fighting, every man laying about him with his stick, now aiming 'into the brown,' now picking out a particular head which offered a fair target. The noise made by the combatants, and the cheers of those who were not engaged in the fight, completely drowned Mr. O'Brien's voice as he called on them to desist and threatened them with all the penalties he could think of. But a minute later the desired object was obtained in an unexpected way. Dan, assisted by two of the stable lads, had brought up his gun to the very edge of the crowd, and fired his blank charge with a huge report into the midst of the combatants. There were shrieks that could not have been rivalled on a battle-field, then silence, and the whole crowd was piled on the ground in all the contortions of a death struggle. It was clear that many of them believed that they were dying or dismembered, but as soon as it was discovered that they had received no injury from the cannonade, the victims rose and even joined in the laughter of the onlookers, while the pipers who had been engaged for the dancing broke out with a long windy blast of martial music.

'Away home with you now, boys,' said Mr. O'Brien. 'You carried your fun a bit too far, but there's no harm done. Go straight home and no more fighting.'

'We will, then, thank your honour.' 'And sure 'twas a grand evening we had.' 'And there 'll be nothing but good luck to the hotel afther making so good a start,' cried one after another.

'And as for the fightin',' said Hickey, the blacksmith, 'there 'd have been no hand raised if 'twasn't for that thief o' the world, John Doolan, spakin' agin' the hotel.'

'That's a lie for you,' replied John Doolan. 'I didn't spake a word agin' it.'

'Don't listen to him, your honour! Michael Condon said there was no finer hotel annywhere than the Ballyvodra Hotel, says he, and Doolan, wid the consait of a schoolmather, he says there's a finer hotel in New York, says he. Say that agin, says Thade Dorgan, and I'll taych you manners, you wandhering Jew, says he, and Doolan repated his story, and wid that Thade hits him a puck, and thin back he got it, and before we knew what 'd happened we were all in it, and 'twas a grand fight for the honour of the hotel, and 'tis the begnin' of good thrade and happy days, plaze God.'

''Twasn't annything I said agin' the hotel, Misther O'Brien,' Doolan began to explain, but was interrupted by other voices.

'Sure 'tis settled,' said one, and 'We knew 'twas in a wake moment he said it, but afterwards he fought just as hard as the rest for the honour of your honour's hotel,' explained another; and then some one proposed three cheers for Mr. O'Brien, and these were followed by three for Miss Kathleen,

and three more for Mr. Barrington, after which the company departed in high spirits and complete concord.

Half an hour later the solitary guest of the Ballyvodra Hotel retired to his room, the lights began to disappear from the windows, and the night reigned with its usual silence over the old place.

CHAPTER XVI

A PENDING ELECTION

THE amazing and humiliating termination of Michael Desmond's relationship with Corinna Temple-Cloud embittered his feeling for a time and lent a new zest to his political animosities, but his personal emotions did not prevent his pursuing with a cool head the large purpose of his life. His winning of the Prime Minister to the cause of Home Rule was perhaps his greatest political triumph. The Bill was introduced, and the Liberal party divided by it. It was rejected in the House of Lords, and at the general election which followed the Tories were returned to office, but by a majority which barely exceeded the combined votes of the Liberals and the Nationalists. Home Rule was postponed but was not dead ; henceforth it was an integral part of the Liberal programme ; and, as there was abundant reason to hope that at the next election the country would reverse its decision, Desmond and his party had good cause to be satisfied. Meanwhile he worked harder than ever. On English as well as Irish platforms his voice was heard. He visited America. At home, wherever the enemy was most formidable, wherever there was a hint of insubordination or question of his

authority, he appeared in person, and by his influence and prestige accomplished his purpose.

It was not until the end of the summer, some time after Parliament had risen, that he found an opportunity of escaping from his duties and paying a long-expected visit to Duhallow; and even then he could not anticipate complete rest, for, in addition to his heavy correspondence, a bye-election was pending in the Duhallow division of the county, where his nominee, Mr. Regan, was opposed by Lord Shandon's son, Horace Croker. Fighting, however, had become almost recreation to him, and he looked forward with pleasure to the prospect of defeating the most influential opponent the Government could have brought against him in his own part of the county.

The saying that a good hater is a good lover may be true, or it may be as untrue as most of the other generalisations about human nature. Desmond, for example, was as incapable of his brother's constant and unselfish devotion in love as was Connor of Michael's power of persistent hatred. His heart had known the stress of passion; he had had more than one love-affair; but these had been mere episodes in his life, while his faculty of hatred, whether for institutions or individuals, remained a constant motive power. Now, those forces of inherited antagonism, which the unforgotten traitor of the family had first brought into being, were directed against that traitor's descendant—the man whose bride he had won and lost.

He had no love for Corinna, but he could not dismiss her from his thoughts. The extraordinary nature of their relationship and her incomprehensible marriage were constantly in his mind. At first, in

recalling her, he had labelled her with a shameful name, but he had afterwards felt that it was unfitting. He despised her, but she interested him as much as ever. He had heard much of her, and on two occasions since her marriage he had seen her. She had become prominent in society. She had established in her London house something as nearly resembling a *salon* as English manners allow. The gatherings of notable people under her roof, her own beauty and wit and charm as a hostess, were much talked of; and she was said to be the one woman with whom her uncle, the late Prime Minister, discussed politics. It appeared that she spoke without hesitation of Desmond, for it was conveyed to him that she was a staunch supporter of his cause, and a firm believer in his power of making it triumph.

On the first of the two occasions when he had seen her she had been on her way to the ladies' gallery of the House of Commons. He was obliged almost immediately afterwards to address the House himself, and it bore witness to his power of self-control that, though aware of her presence, it in no way disconcerted him, and he delivered a speech which, for logical clearness and telling sarcasm, was ranked among his best efforts. On the second occasion he was walking along Whitehall and she driving in the opposite direction. Their eyes met; she bowed, and he returned her bow—all in a moment, and before he had time to consider whether or not he should pass her without notice. She was looking exceedingly well, brilliantly beautiful, and the momentary vision brought back disturbing memories of her fascination.

He had not been home since the time he had parted with her before her marriage, and on his

return the surroundings presented her with new vividness to his mind. He was angry that a woman he despised, one who had deepened his distrust of her whole sex, should occupy his thoughts so much ; and it was strange that he should have felt such violent resentment against the man she had married. She had been untrue to him : how much more untrue to Sir Henry Desmond ? In his apparent success his rival was really the victim. What greater punishment could he have desired for him ? And yet it was a revenge which gave him little satisfaction. He heard with grim emotion that Sir Henry and Lady Desmond were expected at Duhallow Court for a month that autumn.

At this time he began to see a good deal of Kathleen O'Brien. A few days after he returned he walked over to Ballyvodra to call upon her, and, not without curiosity, to inspect the hotel. He had heard from his mother that his uncle had taken up his abode there, and gathered that on the occasion when he had come over to the Castle the meeting had been friendly, though not cordial. Mrs. Desmond had referred with a mixture of amusement and irritation to the hotel ; with some genuine pity for the family, and contempt for the English tourists who formed the majority of the guests. Of Kathleen and her plucky attempt to save her family from ruin she spoke with admiration.

There was a marked difference between the greetings which met Desmond as he passed along the road, and those which his brother Connor was in the habit of receiving among his own people. In Connor's case respect was mingled with familiarity ; in Desmond's the attitude was almost reverential. Where Connor would have stopped to gossip or

exchange merry salutations, Michael went by with a grave recognition ; but a word or a nod from him, the man who was the national hero, was treasured as though it had been a royal favour. He was on foot, and near the Ballyvodra gates was met by one of the hotel carriages containing a party of visitors. Condon, the driver, lifted his hat—a thing he would not have done when sitting behind his horses, in greeting any one else in the world—and, after passing, communicated to his company that it was Mr. Desmond himself. Immediately all heads were turned to survey the great man's back.

‘So this is he that troubleth Israel !’

‘Well, we can say we’ve seen him when we get home.’

‘Yes, he looks what he is. I shouldn’t like to be in that man’s power.’

‘Well, Pat’ (to Condon), ‘is he going to get Home Rule for you? What will you do if you get it?’

These were some of the remarks which followed ; and Condon, who resented the question, and disliked being constantly called Pat by English visitors, when that was not his name, replied rather shortly :

‘Indeed, we’d be doin’ what every one ought to be doin’, sir,’ said he.

‘And what’s that, Pat?’

‘Faith, if we had Home Rule we’d be minding our own business,’ he answered.

As Desmond passed through the gates he noticed that they had been repainted and the words ‘Ballyvodra Hotel’ placed on the piers. He had never allowed consideration of the hardships to individuals to influence his political actions ; but

he was sorry for the O'Briens, really concerned for his friend Kathleen, and, remembering his own part in the movement which had helped to bring about the present position of the family, almost surprised that she should continue to treat him as a friend. Knowing the reason for the general improvement in the appearance of the place, it seemed to him almost pathetic. The old weed-grown avenue, the dilapidated house and ruined garden, had had the dignity of poverty. Now, he saw fresh paint, windows without cracked panes, and a hundred other little signs of repair; but a party of strangers were having tea on the lawn, a couple of youths on bicycles rushed past him in the avenue, a young gentleman smoking a cigarette stood on the doorstep with an air of proprietorship, and everything spoke of a house which was no longer a home.

In the hall he found Kathleen engaged in sorting letters which had come in by the afternoon mail and placing them in a shelf of little pigeon-holes provided for the guests.

'Well, Kitty,' he said, in the familiar way he had spoken to her as a child, 'are you very busy?'

She had not noticed his entrance, and started at the sound of his voice. 'Oh, is it you?' she cried, springing up to greet him, with a flush of pleasure and surprise. 'I heard you were at home.'

He inquired as to her father's health, but made no reference to the changed appearance of the place, —even after they had gone out into the garden and passed the party taking tea on the lawn.

'Well, and what do you think of all this?' she laughed, rather amused at the steady way he ignored the new surroundings.

‘Oh, capital!’ he answered. ‘I hope ’tis succeeding?’

‘Well, not too badly. At first it seemed hopeless, but the last month we’ve been quite busy.’

‘What a brave little girl you are.’

‘Couldn’t you send me some guests,’ she suggested. ‘You’ve only got to give the order and all the Irish members would be writing for rooms.’

‘You’d need to provide one or two padded rooms,’ he replied, with a smile.

‘Is that the way you speak of your own followers?’ she reproved him.

‘Well,’ he admitted, ‘we have some madmen; but, thank God! no fools. Now the English members are nearly all—well, I won’t say fools,—but very dull fellows, nearly all rich and respectable. They go into politics for social and personal reasons, for the position it gives them, not from any desire to serve their country.’

‘Oh,’ she said, with spirit, ‘I am sick of politics and of talk about patriotism. Don’t we love our country as much as any other class in Ireland? and you treat us as its enemies. The landlord as well as the tenant ought to be able to look to you for justice. You ought to be our leader too; but, as Connor says, it is civil war.’

He could see the situation from her point of view clearly enough, and knew it was useless to try to make her look at it from his, with the hotel staring them in the face. For once in his life he found himself justifying his position.

‘I give you my word of honour, Kathleen,’ he said, ‘that in all I do or have done, I have thought of Ireland and not of any class; but all reforms bring hardships, and the innocent have to suffer with

the guilty. I have sometimes thought it possible that you might be able to take the broad view : I mean, that you might almost be able to forget your own class, your own trials, in thinking of the good of the whole country and looking forward to the dawn of a brighter day. It is too much to expect of most people, perhaps, but somehow I had thought it possible with you.'

'No, no !' she exclaimed. 'I can only see my own side ; I can only think of my own troubles, and our changed position, and poor father.'

'And yet,' said he, 'you have remained my friend in spite of it all. You cannot think my cause so unjust or my own motives bad, or you would have turned away from me.'

'No,' she replied, 'that's not the reason : it has nothing to do with it.' She stopped abruptly.

'I have tens of thousands of friends, of one sort, Kitty, but very few like you. I don't want you to misjudge me. Whether you can agree with what I do or not, I want you to know that I am sincere.' He had never spoken to her like this before. 'I want you to believe in me,' he persisted.

'Yes, I will. I do,' she answered.

He took her hand and raised it to his lips,—it seemed almost unconsciously,—the act expressing more convincingly than words the gratitude he felt for her confidence. She belonged to the class he had injured, to those who regarded everything he did with hatred and suspicion, and yet she could trust in the sincerity of his motives. It was worth more to him than the applause of ten thousand partisans. She, too, was moved, troubled she hardly knew why, by his unusual exhibition of feeling. The thought that he held her friendship so highly, that he cared so much for her

opinion, brought a warmer flush to her cheeks. Yet behind the pleasure that it gave her, there arose an uneasy feeling that in her admission she had hardly been true to her own colours.

They were walking through the shrubbery and she was glad of the diversion in their conversation which was created by the sight of Mr. Dan Barrington, who was peacefully sleeping on a garden-seat with some Australian newspapers at his feet and an empty tumbler at his side.

'There's your uncle,' said Kathleen. 'I think you said you didn't know him. Now I can introduce you.'

'I should much prefer not, if you don't mind,' said Desmond, turning. 'It would be a pity to disturb him.'

Kathleen laughed. 'You don't know each other. I'm very fond of him. He's my most valuable guest, and he has really been extremely kind and thoughtful. He has given me more good advice than anybody else about the management of the hotel. He takes a real interest in it, and he never grumbles and finds fault like some of the others.'

'Well, that's in his favour,' said Desmond. 'I suppose some of the beggars make themselves a nuisance.'

'You wouldn't believe the trouble I have with them. Sometimes it's the damp walls, sometimes the door-handles coming off. They even seem to think I am responsible for the rain. There was one English family that stayed three or four days and said they'd been deceived. "Ireland's all humbug," said the father. "Where are the things you advertise? Emerald Isle, indeed!" says he; "the grass is just the same colour it is round Croydon. And where are your colleens? the beautiful girls with black hair

and blue eyes and scarlet hoods, that they show us in the pictures in the railway stations? They all wear boots, and half of them picture-hats. Where's your old peasant in knee-breeches? where's the wit and repartee? and the shillelaghs? Why, they don't even say 'top of the morning' or 'your honour'! We're going home."

'And I expect he wrote a letter to a newspaper on the present condition of Ireland, when he got home,' said Desmond.

'And there was another,' she continued, 'a fussy old gentleman. I think he was a London alderman. I was really rather sorry for him. You know some of our floors are rather old. "You advertise home comforts, young lady," he said to me severely. "This morning when I woke early, a rat was looking at me out of a hole in the floor. Is that a home comfort?" You see what I have to contend with.'

Desmond laughed.

'But,' said Kathleen, 'of course some of them are really nice people and pleased with everything. The only ones I really object to are those who have heard of our troubles and attempt to condole with me. There was a stout lady who nearly had a fall in the drawing-room in consequence of the leg of her chair being loose. "Ah," she said, looking round the room at the furniture, "like yourselves it has seen better days." You see I manage to get some fun out of it all.'

Desmond thought of her a good deal after they parted, and could not help contrasting the charm of her brave and simple nature with the subtle and complex fascination of Corinna. If Corinna had lowered his estimate of her sex, Kathleen had done something to uplift it.

She, poor girl, had a troubled heart after they said good-bye, and she began to understand why she was troubled and how much sadness may lie in the friendship that hides the love that may not be expressed.

At this time the appearance on the scene of a new admirer added to Kathleen's perplexities. The number of visits which Horace Croker, the Unionist candidate for the Duhallow division of the county, paid to Ballyvodra in the opening days of his campaign was not to be accounted for by any doubt as to Mr. O'Brien's vote, or by the necessity for frequent political conferences with Mr. Barrington. That observant gentleman was somewhat flattered at first by the young man's assiduity to obtain his views and advice; but he soon perceived that Mr. Croker's attention was not concentrated on his canvass, and that his visits always terminated in an interview with Kathleen.

She could hardly misunderstand his intentions. When admiration is accompanied by self-confidence the maiden may suspect flirtation, but linked with a measure of timidity it tells her of love. In Horace Croker's very marked attention there was a shyness which was not habitual with him, and he showed a greater deference to her opinion, even on political subjects, than he would have paid to those of a philosopher. Possibly his attitude towards her may have been influenced by the fallen fortunes of the family and an instinctive feeling on his part that the existence of the hotel might make a girl of her spirit less rather than more ready to accept an offer of marriage from a man in his position. This position he did not in the least underestimate. He knew that, as the future Lord Shandon, most of the

girls in the county would have desired no better fortune than that which he proposed for Kathleen O'Brien ; but there was something in her manner to him which forbade him to be over-confident, and on each occasion when he was getting near a confession she had managed to give the conversation a ridiculous turn, or to find some excuse for escaping.

His courtship was indeed a far more serious thing to him than his political campaign. He neither lacked ability nor ambition, and the prospect of a fight, though without much chance of success, in which he would have an opportunity of defending his class and expressing his patriotism, was attractive to him. But to a young man in love, the loss of an election can only seem a trivial thing when compared with the possibility of losing the maiden of his choice ; though perhaps in most cases they matter equally little. There remain at least as many charming ladies who would be ready to accept the rejected hand as there would be constituencies ready to welcome the rejected candidate.

Before making his proposal to Kathleen, Horace Croker took the correct and old-fashioned step of speaking to her father. Mr. O'Brien subsequently had an interview with Kathleen, and communicated the news to her with great agitation. Though he was proud of his lineage, he was conscious, in the time of his misfortunes, of the honour which the young man's proposal did to him and his family. It caused him to realise his position as the proprietor of the hotel with a new shame, and his pride had made him unexpectedly reserved and unsympathetic when Croker had spoken to him. This state of mind passed away, and left him excited and happy in the brilliant prospect which had suddenly opened for his

daughter. The tears were in his eyes as he told her what had passed, and as it had not occurred to him that she might refuse the good fortune offered to her he was surprised by her reception of the great tidings.

‘Father, you must tell him not to ask me,’ she said. ‘It is impossible.’

‘What! my dear——,’ he exclaimed. ‘Why?’

‘I do not love him.’

‘Oh, but you will when you know him better. He is a particularly nice young fellow.’

‘Yes, I know he is, but——’

‘There is no one else you care for, Kathleen, who wants to marry you?’

‘No, no, there is no one else.’ She looked so distressed that he could not help noticing it, and instead of pressing the subject he kissed her affectionately.

‘Think it over, my dear,’ he said, as he left her. ‘Take your time. It is a serious thing for a girl. But Horace Croker is a good fellow like his father, and I can see he loves you truly and honourably.’

The evening after Michael Desmond’s visit to Ballyvodra Connor came home. It was the beginning of the long vacation, and he was looking forward to a holiday after a hard spell of work. He was doing well in his profession, some of the practice which his brother had relinquished on account of the pressure of his political engagements had fallen to him, and he had the reputation of being one of the ablest juniors on the Munster circuit. Though he had taken no public part in politics he was known as a staunch Nationalist, and his brother counted on his entire sympathy and support. It was therefore with surprise and grave displeasure that Michael received a letter

from him on the morning before his arrival at Duhallow, which contained the following paragraph :

In the main I am with you heart and soul, but I consider this 'No rent' agitation not only a mistake but unworthy of our cause. And I also believe it would be hard to find a more discreditable fellow than Regan as a candidate. The thought of alliance with men of his type makes me anxious for the future. You won't mind my plain speaking. We will have it out when I come down to-morrow.

The brothers had no opportunity for discussion until after dinner on the evening of Connor's arrival. In Michael's manner there was a touch of coldness when they met, and during the meal no one but old Mr. Desmond showed much inclination to talk.

The rugged simplicity of the household arrangements at Duhallow Castle had hardly changed since the days when Michael and Connor were boys and the need of money had been greater than at the present time. No touch of modern luxury had been added to the barely furnished oak-panelled dining-room, with its deep window recesses and great ceiling beams, no adornment to the board round which they assembled for their evening meal. Mrs. Desmond, still as of old, thoughtful in her attire, and as picturesque-looking in her age as she had been lovely in her youth, sat at the head of the table ; her husband, greyer-headed and more slovenly in appearance, opposite to her ; her sons on either side. Thady, the butler, clad in corduroy knee-breeches and black tail coat, an old man now, was still in attendance ; and, as in the days far behind, a couple of dogs lay on the hearth, and a single lamp glowed on the table in the deepening twilight.

A want of gaiety in the party seemed to strike Mr. Desmond. 'Faith, we're a merry company,' he

exclaimed at last, 'but maybe a drop of punch 'll be good for us. D'ye hear, Thady, ye blind blackguard! Be quick and bring the materials. And didn't ye hear Dan Barrington had taken up his quarters at Ballyvodra?' he asked Connor.

'I did not, sir,' Connor answered.

'Oh, he's a great man with 'em. They're fattening him up, and they tell me that old Biddy O'Brien, or her sister, or the two o' them, are making love to him. 'Deed Kathleen might do worse than marry him herself and set up her family.'

'Has he been over here?' Connor asked.

'He has then—twice I think it was—and I met him to-day in the village walking with young Croker. "Don't think 'tis your vote I'm after, and run away from me, Mr. Desmond," says Croker to me. He's a pleasant young fellow.'

'I wish he were on our side,' said Connor. 'It would be much pleasanter to vote for him than against him.'

''Tis a wonder he's putting himself up just to be knocked down,' said the old man; 'but we shall see some fun. Tom Begley made a grand verse of poetry about him and the election. They all have it, and Michael's going to print it and put it up on the walls. How's this it goes? "Who skinned the lonely ballet-dancer?" Faith, I can't remember it.'

Michael laughed and came to his father's assistance. "'Who stabbed a nation in its vitals," not the young lady, sir,' he corrected.

'Who stabbed a nation in its vitals?
Who sold their faith to purchase titles?
Who spint the rint on ballet-dancers?
Sure, Mr. Croker have the answers.'

Who stole our lands but ne'er subdued us ?;
Who filled their money-bags like Judas ?
Who skinned us ? By the Holy Poker !
Ye'll hear it all from Mr. Croker !'

'That's first-rate,' said Connor ; 'and so delicately put. Tom does not accuse Horace Croker of these things, but merely refers to him as an authority on the misdeeds of his party. By the way, Lord Shandon and our worthy relation, Sir Henry Desmond, are in opposite camps now. I suppose, as a Liberal, we must regard Sir Henry as an ally.'

A look of displeasure came over Michael's face, and Mrs. Desmond turned to him as though curious to hear his answer.

'I hope to God we'll have no alliance with a member of that family!' said old Mr. Desmond hotly.

'You need have no fear of that, sir,' said Michael. He shot a look of quick suspicion at his brother ; but Connor had made the remark quite innocently, and without any allusion to the former friendly relation between Michael and the lady who had become Sir Henry's wife.

'We hear the Court is being prepared for a visit from its owner,' said Mrs. Desmond.

'It's owner, begad !' exclaimed her husband. 'There won't be much luck for 'em under that roof.'

Mrs. Desmond saw from Michael's face that for some reason the subject of conversation was distasteful to him. She rose from the table a little sooner than usual to make a diversion, and Michael was not long in following her. He went direct to his room in the tower, and, lighting a cigar, drew

his chair to the fire of turf and logs, which, even in summer, was welcome on chilly evenings within those gaunt walls.

Half an hour later when Connor entered, the night had fallen and the only light in the room came from the hearth. He filled his pipe and took a chair opposite to his brother, welcoming the obscurity. It was less difficult to approach a painful subject in its shelter than under clear light when face questions face, and now that he was again in Michael's presence he felt the old influence of his personality, and found it harder than he had anticipated to encounter his displeasure. He came to his task, however, without any hesitation.

'You had my letter,' he said.

'I had,' replied Michael. 'It needs explanation.'

'Well, baldly, I cannot follow you in the "No rent" agitation.'

Michael controlled his anger. 'Our policy has been carefully thought out,' he said. 'We have good reasons for advising the tenants throughout the country to withhold their rents at the present time until we get certain assurances from the Government.'

'Well, that course is contrary to my principles.'

'There are times when it is more virtuous for a man to be guided by the conscience of his party than by his own,' said Michael, with a touch of sarcasm. 'It is not for us to take thought about the cruelty of war: we have to fight our battles, and we must do so with the best weapons available. I am afraid you are not made of fighting stuff. You have too many scruples.'

'I have scruples which make me object to a policy which would bring ruin on my friends.'

'What friends? The O'Briens?' Michael asked quickly.

'There are hundreds in their position, but I was thinking of them,' said Connor. 'I had a letter from Kathleen last week in which she mentioned that they were getting no rent at all now, and found it pretty hard work to carry on the hotel.'

Michael rose and prepared to light the lamp. 'We must think of the good of the country before the interest of our friends,' he said casually.

'Well, I'm damned if I can,' said Connor, 'and what's more, I don't believe such principles are for the good of the country. They're not honest.'

'Connor,' said Michael sternly, 'you're a fool. You've lost your head, and don't realise what your words imply. I can hardly suppose you intend to make a breach between us—but, by God! that's what you're inviting. Don't say any more about it. Go out and think it over. Ask yourself whether it is not your duty to put your private feelings in the background at such a time as this, and remember that he who is not for us is against us.'

There was a cold reasonableness, a stern finality about his words. If there had been added a note of affection or comradeship, Connor would have found himself hard pressed to stand his ground; but Michael, in spite of the coolness of his manner, was angry. He was not accustomed to allow criticism of his political views within the party ranks, and Connor had spoken too plainly. Moreover he resented his brother's attitude in the affairs of the O'Briens. He was himself specially interested in Kathleen—more so of course than Connor was aware—and he chafed at finding himself in the position now forced upon him of apparent indifference to her

happiness. Therefore the winning word of comradeship and confidence, which he so well knew how to weave into his ultimata, was not spoken.

'What's the use of speaking to me as if I were a boy?' Connor replied angrily. 'No, I'm not coming back to-morrow to tell you I'm sorry I said what I meant.'

The lighted lamp shone on the flushed face of the younger brother, on the stern, unmoved countenance of the elder. Yet to Michael the possibility of a breach was almost as painful as to Connor. Suddenly he changed his tone. 'I was not thinking of you as a boy,' he said, 'but as the one man whose loyalty I ought to count on before all others. We'll talk no more now.'

He held out his hand and Connor grasped it eagerly, but he went out with a troubled heart and a sense of divided allegiance. If the brother he looked up to, the man who had awakened the national spirit and led the national cause, claimed his loyal support, did not the girl he loved claim it also? Ay, and whatever were the consequences he determined she should have it.

Michael left home early next morning for Cork on political business, and wrote the following day to say that he was bringing Mr. Regan back with him as his guest for the period of his electoral campaign. It was an unpleasant bit of news to Connor.

'I cannot meet him,' he said to his mother. 'I detest him and his views. He represents the worst sort of American democracy, and is as unprincipled as he is ignorant. I should quarrel with him at once.'

'He's Michael's nominee,' said Mrs. Desmond. 'I've no patience with you, Connor. If you don't like Mr. Regan's principles the best thing you can

do is to go away for a week's holiday somewhere while he is with us.'

'All right,' replied Connor, 'I'll clear out at once.'

Old Mr. Desmond looked troubled. 'What's that you're saying, boy?' he exclaimed. 'I'd be sorry to see you turned out of my house by any one. Stay where ye are.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Connor; 'but I think it may be as well for me to go. I won't be far off. I'll go across to the hotel for a week, and come back when your friend's gone, if I may.'

Mrs. Desmond made no protest and suggested no alternative; and Connor, feeling deeply hurt and angry with the whole world, went to his room and packed a portmanteau. He sent a note over to Ballyvodra to say, that as the accommodation at the Castle was limited, and his room wanted for Mr. Regan, he would be glad of quarters for a few days; and before evening he became one of Kathleen O'Brien's guests.

CHAPTER XVII

CONNOR DESMOND'S TEMPTATION

AFTER dressing very leisurely for dinner, Mr. Daniel Barrington was accustomed, in pleasant weather, to stroll for half an hour on the lawn. In his quarters at the Ballyvodra Hotel he was more comfortable and contented than he had ever been in his life. He had a cheerful private sitting-room, the food and cooking were excellent, and he had imported his own wine. He was in the heart of that part of the country to which he was attached by early associations, he liked the O'Briens, he had grown fond of Kathleen, he found in the place much of the home feeling he had longed for, and the life and movement of the hotel, the coming and going of many people, specially interested him. As a permanent guest he had acquired a feeling of proprietary interest in the establishment, and it was obvious to all comers that he was no ordinary visitor. His place was permanently fixed at the head of the dinner-table ; Carmody and the other servants were markedly deferential to him ; the guests who had been privileged to make his acquaintance spoke of him as an authority on Ireland and Irish politics ; and he was pointed out to new arrivals as a person of importance.

The position pleased him ; and in those half-hours before dinner he enjoyed something of the feeling of a host waiting to receive his guests, without any of the host's anxiety. He had been careful to ascertain the name of any new arrivals, and watched their appearance on the scene with interest ; he had made a point of examining the menu, and knew how he and they were to dine ; and he had arranged with Carmody as to the occupation of the seats next to him at table. He could look back on a well-spent day—that is to say, he had taken exercise and had been exceedingly moderate as to his eating and drinking ; and he could look forward to the prospect of a well-spent evening—to wit, one in which he would dine well and drink generously and enjoy the afterglow, with the pleasant accompaniment of good tobacco and probably a rubber of whist.

For three evenings Mr. Barrington's complacent meditations before dinner had been diverted from their usual channel. On the first he had been surprised to see his nephew, Connor, drive up to the hotel with his portmanteau ; on the second he was occupied with the result of some observations he had made during the day of this young man's demeanour, especially in his attitude to Kathleen O'Brien ; and on the third he was preparing to carry out a scheme which was the outcome of his observations.

On this last occasion he was joined a few moments before the dinner-bell rang by the chief subject of his meditations. He hailed his nephew with evident pleasure, but looked critically at his tweed suit.

'Don't you dress for dinner?' he asked.

'Oh, d'you think it necessary?' Connor answered.

'H'm—well, there are ladies, and somehow I don't like seeing a man drink port in a Norfolk jacket. There's a bottle to-night which ought to be all right; it has had three months' rest. My advice to you is to drink water through dinner, or perhaps one glass of Manzanilla. It's the only way to enjoy good wine afterwards. Upon my honour, Connor, I'm damn glad to have you here with me. Blood's thicker than water, and when one has as few relations as I have——'

'Any specimen is welcome,' laughed Connor.

'I am reminded,' said Mr. Barrington, 'that, in the capacity of uncle, I have an invitation for you to this ball at the barracks. I called on them, and a party of them were over here at lunch to-day, complaining of their sad lot, and wondering how they can exist till the beginning of the hunting season. And they're disgusted because Kathleen O'Brien, the nicest girl in the neighbourhood, is not going to the ball.'

'And why isn't she going?' asked Connor.

'Because her father hasn't called on the regiment, and won't. The old girls would give their eye-teeth—if they have any left—to go; but O'Brien's too proud. He considers that now he keeps a hotel it would be unbecoming to call.'

'And he's quite right,' said Connor; 'absolutely right.'

'I suppose he is. Do you see that old fellow who has just come out?—there, in a white waistcoat, on the door-step. He arrived to-day with a party, and he tells me he's a friend and neighbour of your relative, Sir Henry Desmond. Babbage, that's his name.'

Connor gave a supercilious glance in the direction indicated.

‘They’re at our end of the table, and there’s a girl in the party. I hope Carmody’ll see that she’s next you.’

The dinner-bell rang and Mr. Barrington took his nephew’s arm.

‘Remember what I said about the wine,’ he added ; ‘and if you’ve nothing special to do after dinner come and smoke in my room. There’s a thing or two I want to talk to you about.’

The guests assembled were about twenty in number, mostly English and Americans. They brought with them an aroma of affluence, of comfort, a suggestion of consols and railway debentures, and houses full of modern conveniences. There was a noisy party from Belfast at one end of the table, but the better class of Irish people was not represented : their money for holiday-making had been spent a generation earlier.

Memories of his boyhood, of the old days when he had dined at Ballyvodra, were in Connor’s mind as he took his place at the table in the transformed dining-room. There were lighted lamps on the tables, but the daylight lingered, and the windows were still open. Inside the change was complete : the enlarged chamber full of strangers bore no resemblance to that shabby old dining-room Connor remembered, and the sound of Carmody’s voice came to him as a curious lingering echo of the past ; but looking outward through the window opposite to him the old picture remained. The view across the park of the boundary fence, the belt of fir trees, the distant slopes of darkening mountains,—all were the same, and yet there was a change here too : the charm of privacy, which gave its own distinction even to the outlook, was gone.

The scene would have amused and interested Connor if he had had nothing on his mind ; but sitting at that table, feeling something of an outcast from his own family, and one among strangers in the house of the girl he had known and loved since his boyhood, it was not surprising that he was occupied with his own thoughts and took little part in the conversation going on round him. Usually genial with chance acquaintances, that evening he felt a positive dislike to his fellow-guests, and heard their comments on the hotel and their remarks on his country with impatience.

Young Mr. Babbage was entertaining his party with extracts from the visitor's book : " " Mr. and Mrs. Podmore and maid," he quoted, " The Laurels, Oldham, England. The scenery beautiful and every one *most* civil and obliging." That's rather a frequent entry in visitors' books. I always study them. They never leave out the maid. Mrs. Podmore wishes us to know that she is a lady of quality.'

'He's at Oxford,' Mrs. Babbage confided to Mr. Barrington in a whisper, as though to account for her son's cynicism.

A haughty-looking lady, followed by two figureless pink-cheeked daughters, swept into the room and took the seats on Connor's left. They were neighbours of the Babbages, and with the Rev. Mr. Prince, the curate of Wyck St. Mary, completed the party which had arrived that day.

' " Mr. and Mrs. Todd and Miss Violet Todd," ' continued the young man in quotation, " " enjoyed a most happy week at the Ballyvodra Hotel, and in spite of Jupiter Pluvius " (you see Mr. Todd is a classical scholar) " carry away with them delightful memories of the Emerald Isle." ' "

To avoid having to listen further, and partly with a sense of neighbourly obligation, Connor turned to the pink-cheeked young lady on his left.

'Pleasant evening for a drive,' he remarked. 'I suppose you came over from Mallow?'

'I beg your pardon,' she replied, without looking at him.

'Quite pleasant,' replied the mother for her daughter frigidly. 'Pass the water, Gladys.'

This proud lady's father had been a prosperous pink-cheeked jeweller in the Strand, but she herself had moved in military and ecclesiastical circles—her husband had been in the Militia, and she had a brother who was a minor canon—and she did not approve of familiarity on the part of chance hotel acquaintances.

Mr. Babbage junior was continuing his quotations from the visitors' book. 'They seem to have had a variety of guests,' he said. 'A photographer who mentions his terms, the Bishop of Pippirikki—wherever that is—and this entry struck me: "Mr. Parkinson and Miss Newth spent two days at the Ballyvodra Hotel. They enjoyed their visit extremely." Well, all I can say is they had no business to.'

'Why shouldn't they?' asked his father innocently.

The young man discreetly went on to the next entry. 'But this really interests me. Three Birmingham gentlemen write: "The dulness of the place was compensated for by the excellence of the whisky and the charms of our pretty and entertaining hostess." Now what I want to know is, when is she on view? I might be tempted to write something myself after seeing her.'

'Naughty boy!' said his mother reprovingly, and Connor gave the unmannerly youth a look which

only the presence of others prevented his converting into words. He angrily recognised the humiliation to which his friends were subjected now that the privacy of their family life was broken through. Never did the power of money seem so attractive to him as when he thought of the possibility it might have given him of freeing Kathleen from her present surroundings.

At this period of dinner a little interruption took place which, though it might have seemed quite natural to Irish people accustomed to the ways of our country, was a little surprising to the English guests. Carmody, hard pressed to keep pace with the demands of the company, was busy drawing corks and running to and fro with bottles of wine and soda-water ; his junior, Coneen Cal, was carving ducks at the side-board ; and some maids and a new waiter were attending to the tables, when a ragged messenger appeared at the door and announced, 'A telegram for Captain Johnson.'

'Does anny gentleman know where Captain Johnson is?' asked Carmody ; and his staff, keenly interested, suspended all operations of service awaiting the reply.

'He passed the window a minute ago in a car,' said Mr. Barrington. 'He has hardly reached the lodge.'

'Sure enough, he's gone to Mallow to catch the mail,' exclaimed Coneen Cal, dropping his carving-knife and fork. 'Give me the message, Mike.'

With amazing promptitude he dashed out of the room with the telegram, and the next minute shot past the window on a bicycle, and without his coat, in pursuit of Captain Johnson ; the ducks, meanwhile, remaining uncarved, and half the guests with empty

plates before them. Some of them were amused, some indignant.

'How absurdly Irish!' remarked the haughty lady to her daughter.

'Here, waiter! waiter! are you going to give us any dinner? I call it scandalous mismanagement,' said one hungry-looking old gentleman.

Mr. Barrington laughed heartily, but he was nevertheless jealous for the good reputation of the hotel, and was beginning to be annoyed at the general confusion, when Coneen's figure on the bicycle again flashed past the window. The next minute, clothed in his long-tailed coat, he was back at the sideboard carving his ducks; and beyond a triumphant aside to Carmody, intimating the point in the road at which he had overtaken Captain Johnson, gave no sign that he was conscious of any interval.

The incident caused a good deal of laughter at Mr. Barrington's end of the table; and Mrs. Babbage asked if it were true that the whole establishment were managed by Miss O'Brien, 'a mere girl,' she understood.

'A mere girl, but one in ten thousand,' replied Mr. Barrington; and Connor again had to bear the discomfort of hearing the lady, whose name was sacred to him, discussed publicly.

'Lady Desmond spoke of her to us when she heard we were coming here,' said Mrs. Tuckett, the haughty lady.

'Yes, she seems to have fallen in love with Ireland,' said Mrs. Babbage, who seemed anxious to show that she also was acquainted with Lady Desmond. 'We dined with them shortly before we left home. Do you know them, Mr. Barrington?'

'No, but I think my nephew does; he's a

relative of theirs.' Mr. Barrington looked towards Connor.

'I don't know Sir Henry. I met Lady Desmond once before they were married,' replied Connor.

'Wonderful woman!' remarked Mr. Babbage senior.

'The best-looking woman in London,' added his son.

'And so clever,' said Mrs. Tuckett. 'Even my brother Edwyn, who is so critical, admits that.'

'Certainly out of the common,' observed Mrs. Babbage. 'There is nothing conventional about her, and one hears odd things. Now her marriage. I am told on the best authority that up to the night before the wedding she had not positively made up her mind whether she would marry Sir Henry or not; and of course, beautiful and clever as she is, it was a wonderfully good match for her, for her father is quite a poor man and—well——'

'Oh, she hesitated, did she?' asked Mr. Barrington.

'Yes. Mrs. Down Ampney, that's our rector's wife, told me herself. The very evening before the wedding she told her mother she had made up her mind not to marry Sir Henry, and poor Mrs. Temple-Cloud went over to the rectory in the greatest distress and begged Mr. Down Ampney to see her daughter. The rector agreed, but when he arrived Miss Temple-Cloud refused to see him. Of course it all came right, and we little thought when we were at the church next day what had taken place. The bride was perfectly calm and looked quite happy; but Mrs. Down Ampney assures me it was only at the last moment she made up her mind.'

'There's an argument in favour of the celibacy of

the clergy,' observed Mr. Barrington. 'Rectors tell secrets to their wives, and the wives cannot hold them.'

'Oh, I'm sure Mrs. Down Ampney is most discreet,' said Mrs. Babbage. 'But really I'm not sure that I don't agree with you as to the desirability of the clergy not marrying.'

The Reverend Mr. Prince and one of the pink-faced Miss Tucketts exchanged sudden glances, then looked down. Though marriage is not a sacrament in his Church, it is a fortieth article, and he felt bound to speak.

'I think a clergyman more than any other man needs the loving sympathy of a woman in his work,' he said.

'Good old Prince!' remarked Mr. Babbage junior.

'Will you—can you, be serious, Leslie,' protested his mother, in a tone which mingled admiration with reproof.

'I understand the Desmonds are expected this week,' Mr. Babbage said. 'How far is it to the Court? Oh, only a couple of miles. We are looking forward to seeing them while we are here. Now he's a man I consider a typical English gentleman—polished, dignified, and reserved. No trace of his Irish descent left. But England absorbs other nationalities. Take my own family. We are, as our name indicates, of French origin, and yet—I think no one would mistake me for anything but an Englishman.'

'Yes, there are Babbages still left in Brittany,' his wife added, in corroboration.

'And wherever we find a Babbage, be he never so humble—we have discovered them amongst the

peasantry—we do not disclaim relationship,' he continued confidently. 'We are of the same old stock.' Which might have been true of their attitude to their supposititious French kinsfolk, but was certainly not so in the case of some authentic and very British relatives who lived over their own shops and had not yet learnt that their name did not rhyme with the word 'cabbage.'

'I hope we shall get a peep at Mr. Michael Desmond while we are so near him,' said Mrs. Babbage. 'One hears so much about him.'

'How do he and Sir Henry get on?' asked her husband. 'I suppose since this alliance between the Liberals and the Home Rulers they are pulling together. I'm a Liberal myself.'

'Michael Desmond will get all he can out of you, and it's my opinion he loves you about as much as he loves your opponents,' said Mr. Barrington; and with an after-thought that it was not fair to discuss Michael before Connor he added, 'I ought to have introduced my nephew, Mr. Connor Desmond, Michael Desmond's brother.'

'Ah, glad to meet you, sir,' said Mr. Babbage. 'No idea you were here.'

'How very interesting!' added his wife, with a smile and a nod.

Mrs. Tuckett relaxed her attitude of severity towards Connor, and remarked to him that she was no politician herself.

'And that's really your castle!' said the daughter sitting next to him—'that picturesque old place we can see from the grounds. How I envy you!'

The Reverend Mr. Prince looked anxious. A vicarage was the most romantic casket in which he could hope to enshrine a maiden.

'I wonder what it feels like to live in a castle?' she added.

'It makes you feel very wicked,' replied Connor, forgetting his snub, and always ready to be merry with a girl. 'We used to shed blood like anything, and bear off beautiful damsels belonging to the enemy. You wouldn't have been safe so near us a few centuries ago.'

'Oh, really!' exclaimed Miss Tuckett, delighted. 'You almost frightened me.'

'We have a dungeon under the tower,' said Connor.

'How thrilling! Fancy, mother, Mr. Desmond has a dungeon.'

Connor was about to concoct some further nonsense when he found himself unexpectedly greeted. A tall, good-looking young man, dressed in riding-breeches, had entered the room, and after a hasty survey of the guests came round to him.

'Hullo, Connor, my boy!' he announced himself. 'I've found you at last. How are you, Mr. Barrington? No room here? I'll find a place at another table. I've been canvassing, and came in for a bit of food on my way home. See you afterwards, Connor.'

'Croker, the man who is fighting the seat for the Government,' Mr. Barrington told Mr. Babbage as the young man departed.

'The Hon. Mr. Croker,' Mrs. Tuckett whispered to her daughter. 'Lord Shandon's son. I do hope he will succeed.' She perceived that he was very intimate with Connor Desmond, and was really annoyed that she had treated her neighbour at table so coldly at first.

Connor had not seen Horace Croker since his

return, and as he had no idea that the object of his visit to Ballyvodra was anything other than he had stated, he was as pleased to meet his old friend as could be expected in his present mood.

In spite of the many interruptions in the continuity of service, dinner was nearly over when Croker arrived, and on the departure of the ladies of the Babbage party he accepted Mr. Barrington's invitation to come over to his table; but his meal was a very hurried one, and both he and Connor disappointed Mr. Barrington by their disinclination to sit with him over the wine. Croker was the first to go, with a murmured excuse of a message from his father to Mr. O'Brien, and Connor almost immediately followed, leaving Mr. Babbage and his uncle to finish the bottle of port together.

The breath of summer was still in the air, and the lingering twilight called many of the guests out of doors. Connor, as one of them, felt himself at a greater distance from Kathleen than when he had been at home. He had seen hardly anything of her since his arrival—half an hour that morning, and ten minutes the previous evening in the garden: enough to leave him discontented, to make him aware that every time he met her the trouble that filled his heart was greater. Comradeship was so evidently the part she expected of him; comradeship so increasingly difficult a part for him to act. He was no laggard, in love; but feeling that his friendship was all she needed, knowing that as a poor man he could not help her in her difficulties by asking her to be his wife, consideration for her and something of pride had kept him silent. He had endured a good many years of this relationship, consoled by the lover's exaltation in loving—the faith that no other

could love his lady as he did—and saved from the compulsion of putting his slender chances of winning her to the proof by the absence of a rival ; but now he felt that he could walk in the old path no longer, and that before his present holiday came to an end he must know his fate definitely.

The spur of jealousy, which was all that had been needed to make him take the risk of confessing his love to Kathleen, touched him at last from an unexpected quarter. On the chance of seeing Kathleen he had walked through the shrubbery to the garden which had once been her own—the flower-bordered path within the broken walls, which still claimed her love though it was no longer private. Opening the door he saw her, but she was not alone. Her companion was Horace Croker, and it hardly needed the quick perception of a lover to recognise in the earnest tones of his voice, in her silence and bent head, that no common topic of conversation occupied them. Connor turned back hastily without being noticed, but the scene was enough to turn him from a patient to a reckless lover. Half an hour later when, according to promise, he went to his uncle's private room, he was in a mood which made it easier for Mr. Barrington to approach him on a difficult subject than he had expected.

Lighted candles were on the table, but the windows were still open, and the old gentleman was seated at one of them smoking a cigar when Connor entered. It was a cosy room, furnished at his own expense, and he himself added to its air of comfort.

'Bring your chair here,' he said to Connor, 'and light your pipe. I know it's no use to offer you a cigar. You youngsters don't know how to live. You bolted your dinner and refused my port. But

it's only after a long life's work that I have learnt how to sit still, so I can't lecture you. Come, settle down. You look worried.'

'Well, I am worried,' said Connor, subsiding into an easy-chair and filling his pipe. 'The hotel worries me. I knew the place in its old days.'

'And you don't like to hear Miss Kathleen criticised by the guests. You wanted to kick that young Babbage when he was quoting from the visitor's book. The father's not too bad. I like these prosperous middle-class Englishmen who have made their way well enough—but their sons, who seem half-ashamed of their fathers! it takes something more than a public school to make gentlemen of them.'

'I shall be off in a day or two,' said Connor.

'What, back home? I thought Regan was there, and there was no room in the house for the two of you. I wish you'd get your pipe properly lighted. I hate to see a fellow looking uncomfortable.'

Connor laughed and struck another match. 'No, I shall not go home while he is there,' he said.

'You don't approve of this "No rent" robbery scheme, I hope.'

'No,' replied Connor, 'of course I don't.'

'And though I know you are a staunch Home Ruler, I daresay you would not be sorry to see Croker beat him in the election. And how much more of this sort of thing is going to be included in the Nationalist programme? I would almost give my own support to a patriotic party that aimed at Irish self-government and could be trusted to do justice to all classes. But don't you see that Home Rule is becoming a purely democratic movement.' His warmth increased as he went on. 'Is it patriotism

or socialism? When your friend Regan calls for the restoration of the land to its lawful owners, what the devil does he mean? The O'Briens owned the soil from time immemorial. Some of their tenants, the people he wants to restore to it, are descendants of Cromwell's soldiers. It is all damned humbug.'

'If our own class had shown a spark of patriotism,' said Connor, 'and had trusted the people instead of grovelling to England, fellows like Regan would not have got a hearing.'

'Well, well,' said Mr. Barrington, 'I did not ask you to come in here to hear a lecture on politics. I know you're a firm believer in Home Rule, and I don't expect to make you change your views, but I'm glad we're agreed on some points. We'd both rather see Croker get in for Duhallow than Regan.'

Connor was in no mood to wish for Horace Croker's success in anything, but he admitted that he was a better man than his opponent to represent any decent community. 'He's engaged in fighting for a greater prize than the seat in Parliament,' said Mr. Barrington, suddenly developing his attack, 'and that prize is Kathleen O'Brien. I know that he has already spoken to her father on the subject. Do you intend to let him cut you out?'

Connor rose and knocked the ashes from his pipe at the window. With as much indifference as he could assume he said, 'Why should you suppose this concerns me?'

'Look here, my lad,' said Mr. Barrington, 'let's be friends. Perhaps my interest in you and in her has made me a bit more observant than I otherwise might have been. I know you love her, and there's not another girl in the world I should be so pleased to call my niece. And I don't believe there's any one

she really cares for so much as yourself ; and if you could do for her what Croker can, if you could save her family from poverty and shut up the hotel, she wouldn't give him a second thought. You'll forgive me for thrusting myself into your confidence.'

'Yes, sir, but I'd rather not talk about it,' said Connor. 'I can do nothing to help her.'

'You can do everything to help her ; at least, you and I can together.'

The old man got up and shut the door, which had been left slightly open, Connor hardly noticing what he was doing.

'You know,' he said, as he returned to his seat, 'that I have often told you it was my wish to make you my heir. My life is a lonely one, and I have had no greater hope than that you might be something of a son to me. When I spoke to you about it before, I made some conditions which you would not accept. There are some conditions still, but they are not the same.'

He paused and looked at the young man's troubled face, and seemed doubtful how to proceed. He had a personal affection for him and a desire to win his affection, which was even stronger than his hatred of Michael's political views, or his longing to triumph over his sister by inducing Connor to repudiate them. At the present moment he was keenly anxious to avoid the appearance of taking advantage of Connor's love for Kathleen to press conditions on him. He was striving to establish an understanding between them that would remove any suggestion of a bargain.

'It's not that I want a mere heir for my money, Connor,' he went on. 'I'd a hundred times rather leave it to an institution than to a fellow I did not

care for ; but I want one who could show himself so far a son to me that he could respect my convictions, and that he would meet me half-way perhaps on certain points where we differ—even that he would make some sacrifice. There must be affection, a true partnership between us. I don't ask you to be untrue to your principles. I do ask you to take a course which may be, which is sure to be, condemned by your brother.'

'You know my secret, sir,' said Connor, 'and no one in the world but yourself can help me. Anything I could do honestly——'

'I ask nothing else,' Mr. Barrington broke in. 'Let us put it in as few words as possible. I dislike the whole Nationalist programme : I am a Unionist ; and once or twice when I have offered to make you my heir I have made it a condition that you should stand with me and support the Union yourself. I see that's out of the question. You would be acting dishonestly to your convictions. Remain a Nationalist if you must ; but remain as one who will help to save your party from discredit, to purify it from within, to purge it of robbers and fenians and convicts,—the Regans who are now disgracing it. You will not be going back on your principles : you will be asserting them, for I know your views. Here, let me put it baldly ; and for God's sake, don't think I'm taking advantage of your being in a corner to try and get my own way ! Oppose Regan at the election—openly and without fear of Michael's resentment. Go to Croker's meeting at Mallow next Wednesday and support him, and give me your promise to disassociate yourself in the future from this 'no rent' movement, or any other scheme of spoliation. Do this for me, and in return I give you the fruits of

my life's work. For me! I said. Do it for your own credit and for the credit and honour of your party. Do it for the sweetest girl in Ireland.'

Connor began pacing up and down the room. Strong emotion made him incapable of clear thought, unable to make any response.

'You'll want time to think it over, my lad,' said Mr. Barrington, 'but don't hesitate, or you may be too late. I respect you for not asking Kathleen to marry you. As a poor man you had no right to. Now you may go to her as a suitor who has the right. I promise you that if you will do what I have said, I will put you in a position to pay off all the mortgages on the property and reinstate the O'Briens in the old place.'

'If she doesn't love me enough to marry me as a poor man——' Connor began.

'Oh, I know what you mean,' his uncle interrupted him. 'You don't like the idea of her marrying you for your money, but that's not a fair way of putting it. I believe she loves you well enough to marry you as a poor man, but she daren't. She has not allowed herself to think of you as a husband, and you have not allowed yourself to make love to her. Croker wants to marry her, and though he's the best match in the county for a girl, she's hesitating. If she takes you in preference, it won't be for your money, but without it her sense of duty makes it impossible. Don't let the other fellow cut you out, Connor. Go and make love to the girl and win her before it's too late.'

There was a knock at the door, and Carmody entered with a message from Miss Bridget to Mr. Barrington inviting him to make a fourth in a rubber of whist. The interruption was not unwelcome,

Connor being in a state of mind in which he found it impossible to give his uncle any reply, and Mr. Barrington feeling that there was nothing more he could say with advantage. He sent word to Miss Bridget that he would come immediately, and, after Carmody had closed the door, made a little joke of the occasion.

‘Remember, Connor,’ said he, ‘that I’m still marriageable, and that Kathleen has two aunts who are not insensible of my charms. Now don’t you hesitate about my offer, or perhaps I’ll be taking other steps to provide myself with an heir. Well, you must go and think it over quietly, and come back to-morrow and tell me what you have decided. Oh, laddie! if I were in your place and had the chance of winning that girl, ’t isn’t long I’d be making up my mind.’

CHAPTER XVIII

CONNOR DESMOND'S DECISION

CONNOR DESMOND went to his room and tried to think out the position in which he found himself; but calm reflection was impossible, and before long his feverish mood drove him out of doors. Forces beyond the immediate control of his will—the inherited class instincts of his race, his sense of honour, pride, jealousy, passionate love—were at war within him, and the decision of one moment was swept aside by the impulse of the next. Physical exercise became a necessity, and, hardly knowing which direction he was taking, he passed through the Ballyvodra gates and set off at a rapid pace along the road. The September night was cool and bright with stars, and a mist lay over the meadows bordering the river. The cottages at the cross-roads were dark, not a soul was on the roads, and a gleam of light which came from a window in the old tower of Duhallow Castle was the only sign of life in the lonely country. Connor walked on and was glad when he saw that point of light no longer.

Two pictures tortured his fancy: one of Kathleen O'Brien as another man's wife; the other of himself wooing her in the guise of that younger son of infamous tradition who had betrayed his brother.

The first was the more insistent, and as the memory of her sweetness wove itself into the picture, he swore to allow no scruple to stand in the way of his winning her. Then, when it seemed his decision had been made, the battle began again. He saw Kathleen given to him as the wages of treachery; he heard himself branded as a traitor by his countrymen, his name a word of shame in his own house.

And this, and more than this, he could have suffered for her sake, if he had not stood condemned before himself; if he had not felt that by being dishonourable for her sake he would be dishonouring her.

An hour's hard walking worked off some of his feverishness, and he began to think more deliberately. The situation presented itself to him thus: he believed his uncle was right in assuming that, if he were in Horace Croker's position to help Kathleen, she would choose her old comrade before her new admirer. The chance of being in this position was his, and what were the conditions? He was asked, not to repudiate, but to vindicate his principles. He had already expressed his condemnation of the 'no rent' agitation and his disapproval of Regan to Michael. He was now asked to do so publicly, though he was still free to support his brother and his cause. In short, he was given the opportunity of upholding all that was great in the Nationalist cause and of pleading for its purgation from all that would dishonour it. This was perfectly true, and yet, while he recognised its truth, a feeling of hypocrisy sickened him. It came of the recollection that he was to be paid for his protest, of a recognition that if he were not paid for it he would not have thought of publicly repudiating a scheme which was approved by his brother, or of opposing

a candidate he had nominated. Again, the thought of appearing as the supporter of Horace Croker, his rival, in order that he might supplant him, was revolting, and seemed comparable to the betrayal made by Judas with a kiss. However deliberately he looked at his position, he could not escape from the two pictures which had first flashed on his mind. Honour and Love were opposed; he was too honest to attempt to confuse the issue, and temptations to compromise he rejected. One of them—that he should refuse his uncle's conditions, but nevertheless endeavour to find favour in his sight with a view to ultimate benefits, and that he should propose to Kathleen, telling her that he had expectations in the future—he dismissed as contemptible. If he had to choose the dishonourable part, it should be boldly and openly, and coupled with the punishment from which there was no escape.

Love is, indeed, a perplexing moralist. Hitherto Love had called for all the chivalry and loyalty, all the best and most generous feelings of Connor's nature; now it bid him defy them. And shall it be said that it was not Love which spoke to him thus? that True Love would have chosen the sorrow of losing nobly rather than the shame of winning ignobly? It is a great ideal; but can he who holds it maintain it against the appeal of a sweet face or the eloquence of a touch that thrills him? Love may lead us to seek the highest; but when we cannot reach the star to which he points, may he not sometimes turn back with us in our failure?

Connor had been away for two hours when he re-entered the Ballyvodra gates. It was after midnight; and unwilling to disturb the household by knocking, and careless whether he went to bed or

walked about all night, he turned aside and took the path that led round the house through the shrubberies. Here a light which came from the private sitting-room used by the O'Briens caught his eye, and, thinking that probably one of the boys was sitting up, he crossed the lawn towards the window. It was open, and the blind only partly drawn, so that he had a full view of the interior of the room. In an arm-chair beside a table, covered with bills and account-books, Kathleen O'Brien lay asleep. Her head was pillowed on the curve of her arm which rested on the table, and the soft light of a shaded lamp fell on her flushed cheek and beautiful hair.

The chivalrous instincts of a man are touched by the sight of a girl asleep. For the happy lover the world has no sweeter sight : he has won the right of watching over her sleep. For him who has no such claim the picture may have more of pain than joy, and very love may bid him turn away lest he should wrong the maiden by his worship while she is defenceless from his gaze.

Connor, with a beating heart, hurried on through the shrubbery paths, haunted by the sweet picture from which he fled. Imagination led him back to lay the beloved head against his shoulder, and jealousy shattered the dream with the presentation of another in his place. The contest between love and his sense of honour was over. No plea could stand against the eloquence of the picture he had looked upon, and for good or evil he determined to allow no barrier in the world that he could beat down to remain between him and his heart's desire. And now that his mind was made up, he was impelled to immediate action. An irresistible

attraction led him back to Kathleen. The sound of his footsteps on the path did not awaken her, but when he had called her name a second time she started up with a bewildered look.

'Tis Connor,' he said. 'I was locked out.'

'Oh,' she cried, jumping up, 'how you frightened me! I've been asleep. What time is it? You can come in this way.' He remained standing at the window as she continued, 'I went to sleep over my work. Our book-keeper had a headache, and there were lots of accounts to finish.'

'Are they finished?' Connor asked. 'Perhaps I could help you.'

'Oh yes,' she answered. 'I finished before I went to sleep. When you called me I was just dreaming that one of our guests, who is going to-morrow, refused to pay his bill because, when he woke in the morning, he found the turkey-cock standing on his chest. It is true the turkey-cock was in the house to-day.'

This was not the sort of dream which had been suggested to Connor by the vision of Kathleen asleep, but the confession brought no anti-climax to his picture. The girl just awake from her sleep, with her hair a little disarranged, her cheeks flushed, and her eyes full of fun, needed no whisper of the fancy to complete her charm. The gaiety of her manner, however, was but an expression of the habitual bravery of her nature. She had fallen asleep not only weary but sick at heart. Horace Croker had that evening proposed to her, and though she had postponed her answer, she had come to the conclusion that it was her duty to accept him. In *her* soul also the battle between love and duty had been fought—if, indeed, that

devotion of her childhood, that strange hero-worship which Michael Desmond still called from her, were love; and being assured that he did not love her, she had felt that she did wrong in allowing her thoughts to dwell on him. For the sake of a sentiment she could not refuse the chance of serving her family, of freeing her father from the humiliation which was making his old age unhappy; but the smooth path which she saw before her looked harder than the rough one on which she had been travelling.

Kathleen collected her bills and put them in a drawer while she was speaking to Connor. She then came to the window.

'What sort of a night is it?' she asked, looking out. 'Still summer? How sweet the air is.'

'Come out,' he said. 'I want to talk to you.'

'So I will,' she replied; 'and 'tis so warm I needn't get a cloak.'

She stepped out over the low window-sill and found her hand in his without making any attempt to withdraw it.

'An old friend you can always rely on is a great comfort,' she said, as a comment, it seemed, on the familiarity of the situation.

They walked a little way along the dark shrubby path before he spoke.

'I want to ask you if you have promised to marry Horace Croker?' he then said.

She was taken aback by the directness of the question, but she did not resent it. She felt that Connor had almost a right to her confidence.

'I have not promised yet, Connor,' she replied in a low voice. 'I may have to, I think. I mean I am going to, but I have not yet done so.'

'Oh, thank God for that!' he exclaimed; and his hand unconsciously closed on hers with a grip that almost pained her.

Her secret dread of the loveless marriage was indicated by the fact that instead of resenting Connor's evident disapproval of it, she heard it with a feeling of relief. She had almost expected him to join in the counsel of prudence, and even now that he had spoken so vehemently to the contrary she did not suspect the reason.

'You don't love him,' Connor said.

'I may not be in love. Girls grow to love their husbands,' she answered, with an afterthought that though she was talking to her old comrade there was a sort of prospective disloyalty in discussing her feelings for a man whose wife she might, and probably would, become.

'Does he know you don't love him, Kathleen?'

'You must not ask me these questions, Connor,' she answered.

He still held her hand, and she felt it tremble as he spoke.

'If I thought you loved him, Kathleen, I would not say what I am going to say. If I were the poor man I was yesterday, unable to help you, I would not say it. Because I could not help you, and had no right to ask you to marry a poor man, I have kept silent. You haven't even guessed my secret; but since the days when we were boy and girl together I have loved you with all my heart, and have known that I could never love any one else.'

'Oh, Connor!' was all she could say.

'Kathleen, dear, dear Kathleen!' he went on, 'I know how you are placed. I have shared your troubles and anxieties. I have never had you out of

my thoughts. I have felt like a chained prisoner because I could not help you. I understand how it seems a duty to you to help your family by your marriage, and if I could not help you now, I wouldn't ask you to listen to me, and if I did not think I could win your love, I wouldn't say another word.'

'Connor,' she said in great distress, 'I have always loved you. You know that.'

'Yes, as a friend. You never thought of me as a lover, Kathleen; but if I had been able to marry you and help you in your difficulties, it might have been all different. Wouldn't it? Tell me that, Kathleen! You would have taken me then.'

'I don't know. Oh, I cannot tell,' she answered. 'I think I love you so much I should have felt it wrong to marry you unless I had loved you more.'

'You would have thought of me differently, but you have never let yourself think of me as anything but a friend, and now it is different. Kathleen, I can ask you to marry me, not because I have always loved you better than any one else, but because I can help you better than any one else.'

She did not understand his meaning, and he found the task of explanation no easy one. The spirit of the lover resented the necessity of a bald statement of credentials.

'My uncle has promised to make me his heir,' he said. 'He is very rich. He knew I was in love with you, and he is ready to treat me like a son. If you give me the right to help you, I can do it. All the mortgages can be paid off at once, and you can be free and shut up the hotel, and ——' he found it difficult to go on, it sounded so much like a bargain. 'I have to tell you this,' he added, 'because

unless I could show you I was able to help you, I should have no chance. And oh, my dearest, who else has a better right?'

He stood facing her in the darkness, holding both her hands in his, and longing to take her wholly in his arms, while she remained silent and confused. From a sheer sense of duty she had resolved to accept Horace Croker's proposal. Now her old friend, a man she was really attached to, showed himself equally able to help her. Her cheeks were hot with the consciousness of an emotion which had never before existed in her relationship with Connor. He was shown to her no longer as a friend, who would never be more than a friend, but as a lover to whom she might possibly give her love. Her heart leapt with a sudden sense of freedom in the prospect of release from the marriage she dreaded, and the next moment she was filled with shame at the thought of giving elsewhere the hand she had almost pledged without the justification of love. And curiously this sense of shame in a marriage of expediency was infinitely greater when she thought of it in connection with Connor, her dearest friend, than when contemplating it with one for whom she cared but little.

'Who else can have so good a right to help you?' Connor said; but though she made no answer, and her silence was like a whisper of hope, he checked the impulse to speak the words of passionate love that were on his lips. Now, as always, his first thought was of her, and he realised the delicacy of her position. 'I have told you all I have to tell,' he said quietly. 'I can help you: I mean to help you; it is the greatest joy of my life to be able to, and for God's sake don't think I am

asking anything in return for it. Of course I can't help hoping. I have always hoped since the days when we were children that you might love me some day. But, Kathleen, let me do this for you. Let me help you now as if I were your brother, because I want you to be free—utterly free—not only from making a marriage where you have not given your heart, but free to love. I say it honestly. You are so dear to me, that if I thought you loved, or could love, any one better than I could make you love me, I would ask for no more than you have given me in the past.'

'Oh, Connor,' she cried, 'how good you are to me! I don't know how to answer you. I can't even think.'

One thing only was clear to her—that it was now impossible for her to marry Horace Croker. Connor seemed to have freed her from that necessity; but, in the very moment when she realised it, her spirit wove bonds of her new freedom, and a memory of Michael Desmond and the love she had not allowed herself to dream of troubled her heart once more.

They had turned and were walking back towards the house.

'Remember,' Connor continued, 'I don't ask you for any promise—not even for a hope. I want you to be free.' He forced himself to put the lover aside and speak practically. 'Whatever you think about it, I have made up my mind. I am going to take up the mortgages at once. My uncle has made everything easy. I have this and some other business, not so pleasant, to get through, and I shall be going away to-morrow for about a week. We must meet again just as usual. Why, Kathleen,' he

added with a laugh, 'you can arrange now as soon as you like to shut up this beastly hotel.'

'Oh, but I don't know whether I can really let you do this, Connor,' she began.

'You cannot prevent me,' he interrupted her. 'There is nothing more to be said about it.'

They were back at the window, and sufficient light came from the room to let them see each other's faces. She turned from him with a feeling of shyness, it was so clearly the lover who looked, though it had been the friend who had spoken.

'Well, good-night, Kathleen,' he said, noticing her embarrassment and compelling himself to repress the words of love he was burning to express. 'Do you know what time it is? You must go straight off to bed, and I'll put the lights out and shut up after I have smoked a pipe.'

'Good-night, dear old fellow,' she said, trying hard to hide the tears which had suddenly sprung to her eyes.

The interview next morning between Connor and his uncle was a short one, though Mr. Barrington would willingly have prolonged it and discussed in detail the plans of their future alliance. Nothing for years had made him so happy as his nephew's decision. He had found a son in his old age, an heir for his wealth. Life had a fresh interest for him, and at the same time he felt the exhilaration of victory: he had at last triumphed over his sister. He found it difficult to repress his exultation, but he did so. He saw that Connor had made his decision after a struggle, and that he was oppressed with the burden of the consequences of his choice; and he had the good sense to see that reticence would be

appreciated. The only reference to the terms of the agreement came from Connor. He asked for a concession. Throughout a sleepless night the thought of Kathleen and the hope of winning her had given him strength to face the full penalty which his decision had prepared for him, but there was one condition in the agreement with his uncle which struck at the very roots of his self-respect. This was the promise to appear on a public platform in support of the man whom he was seeking to supplant, of winning the power to betray him by playing the part of friend. The anger of his brother, the breach with his family, the contempt of his party, could be borne; but his whole nature shrunk from the treachery of appearing on Croker's platform.

He asked for a concession which made the ordeal greater, the dishonour less. It was this—that instead of appearing at Croker's meeting in support of his candidature, instead of expressing his disapproval of his brother's present policy on the platform of the party opposed to him, he should attend the meeting which had been called by Michael Desmond in support of Regan and there state his views. 'They won't give you a hearing; they'll handle you roughly,' Mr. Barrington objected. 'It would be a much easier business to do it at Croker's meeting. I really should not have asked you to face such an ordeal as you propose.'

He yielded, however, to Connor's insistent request; and in thinking the matter over afterwards, he formed a tolerably correct conclusion as to his nephew's reasons, not without a feeling of pride in the young man who could thus set himself an infinitely harder task than had been asked of him, and who boldly courted the full punishment of his conduct.

Kathleen's name had not been mentioned, but a word or two had been said about the Ballyvodra mortgages, and Mr. Barrington undertook to make immediate arrangements for acquiring them and placing them in Connor's hands. With this object he set off for Dublin to see his solicitor a few hours after the interview, and Connor left at the same time for Queenstown to spend a couple of days with his old schoolmaster.

The meeting of Regan's supporters, at which he had to appear, was fixed for the following Sunday at Buttevant.

CHAPTER XIX

CONNOR DESMOND'S REWARD

THE meeting of Mr. Regan's supporters at Buttevant was one of unusual importance, as it was known that Michael Desmond was to be present and would make a definite statement of the policy of his party on the rent question. In his own neighbourhood he did not often speak, and the chance of hearing him had brought the people of the district together in large numbers. Many enthusiasts had come from places as far off as Cork and Limerick, and special reporters had been sent down by the chief newspapers.

It was Sunday afternoon : the people who had come in for Mass in the morning had not returned home, and by three o'clock the arrivals from the surrounding country filled the little town from end to end. Side-cars, farm-butts, and donkey-carts, all crowded to overflowing, lined the street on either side ; bands of young men wearing jerseys of varied colours, the uniforms of the local hurly clubs, paraded the narrow passage between the vehicles, ready to fight but unprovided with an enemy ; and every public-house was full. Usually the red coats of soldiers from the barracks were conspicuous in the street on a Sunday afternoon ; to-day they were entirely absent, and a police sergeant and two or

three of his men, who watched the proceedings with an assumed air of indifference from the square in front of the constabulary headquarters, were the only evidence of authority or oppression. Outside the largest public-house in the place—Riordan's Hotel, as it was called—a platform had been erected, and decorated with flags and electioneering placards, among which were the rhymes made by Tom Begley on Horace Croker. A couple of verses, which ran as follows, had been added to the original composition :—

While Erin struggles to be free,
If you would help her foes to yoke her,
If you would climb the Orange tree,
Ye'll give your votes to Mr. Croker.

But if you'd baste the Absentee,
And scatther all the priests of Dagon,
You'd betther pay the rint to me,
And give your votes to Mr. Regan.

The poet was there himself with his fiddle, and was taking advantage of the occasion to collect a little money on his own account while the people were waiting for the commencement of the meeting.

In the whole crowd there was perfect unanimity of feeling, a brotherhood which was in no way impaired by a combat which had taken place between two rival hurly clubs and their supporters in the crowd. In the interval between Mass and the hour for which the meeting was called much porter and bad whisky had been drunk, an outlet for fighting instincts had become a necessity, and as every lad had a blackthorn in hand, a very pretty fight had ensued. Up and down the street and among the vehicles the battle raged, while the non-combatants cheered from

the carts and attempted to hold their restive horses and kicking donkeys. But though blood was spilt it was done kindly, and he who fell was picked up by him who felled him. The majority of the people took far less interest in the political question which they were called together to hear discussed than might be supposed. They had no personal enmity to the landlords, no private conviction on the subject of rent ; but perhaps in no other country in the world could a crowd have been collected which was so united by the bond of national sentiment. The political questions of the hour were unimportant details ; they were agreed on these because their leaders were agreed ; but the true bond of their union was the love of their country—the inborn national spirit which had been nursed in the memory of old wrongs and old honour, and had been aroused to new vitality under the leadership of Michael Desmond. If the landlords were unpopular it was not because they were unjust in their dealings, but because they stood aloof and looked coldly on the national aspirations ; and if the Crown was little loved, it was not because it represented the oppression of England, but because it was an absentee power un-identified with the hopes of Ireland. This is the feeling of the Irish people, and only in exceptional cases or in times of excitement does it surge into the violence and impatience of all authority, which in England is regarded as its normal condition.

Michael Desmond, himself one of the old stock, a man who bore a name which had been great in the past, had given the people a new national ideal. He had won their hearts, and they accepted every detail of his policy. Men like Horace Croker, to whom they might have listened with respect, had come

forward too late, too half-heartedly ; men like Mr. Regan, democrats of American moulding, made no permanent appeal to their imagination. But Regan had Desmond's support ; he was fighting the battle under Desmond's captaincy ; and, this being so, every item in his programme was acceptable, every man in that crowd was ready to support him without a question.

Half an hour before the time fixed for the meeting Connor Desmond jumped from the car on which he had driven from Mallow. He was a couple of miles from his destination, but he chose to walk the remainder of the way. He did not lack courage—among a brave race there beat no braver heart than his—but he was troubled at the thought of the task before him. In the interval since he had undertaken it, after hours of silent reflection, after long talks with his old schoolmaster, whose patriotic hopes were as ardent as ever, the task had become thrice difficult. From whatever point of view he looked at it—even while he recognised that in condemning Regan's policy he was justified by conviction—he stood condemned before himself. He saw that the broad effect of his action would be not to call attention to his disapproval of a detail of the policy of his party, but to show division in its ranks ; and that, as Michael Desmond's brother, every word he said would have a special significance. He knew that however he had felt to Mr. Regan and the 'no rent' agitation, loyalty to his brother and faith in his leadership would have kept him silent at the present time if it were not for the reward which was offered to him for uttering his views ; and even the thought of that priceless reward failed to give him strength for the ordeal as the time of his trial drew near.

The road was bare of people ; they were already waiting in the town ; and as he walked on he saw in fancy the crowded street, the people who would hail him as a fighter on their side. In an hour's time they would look at him askance and regard him—a Desmond, Michael's brother—as an enemy. He tried to rehearse mentally some passages of a speech he had made after long hours of painful thought, the speech in which he sought to assert his patriotism, his loyalty to his brother, his devotion to the national cause, while condemning the present agitation. Alone, with his sheet of paper before him, it had been comparatively easy to phrase his views, to call upon his party to purge its cause from injustice ; but the thought of that expectant crowd made confusion of his prepared sentences ; he could not remember them. Time after time during the last few days had he gone through in imagination the scene in which he was about to take part. He had pictured himself approaching the place by the same road on which he now walked, seen the crowd, heard voices of welcome, met his brother's questioning look. Now the scene he had pictured with a chill at heart was imminent, and though his courage, his determination, did not falter, his nerve was unsteady. It would have been difficult to find for a man a greater ordeal than that which he had chosen to face. To go into battle with one's comrades, to meet any danger that could be imagined, seemed a happy dream compared with the thing he had to do—to enter his own camp, to be greeted with joy by the people, welcomed by his brother, his leader ; and then to know himself branded as a traitor, and to feel that he deserved to be so branded. He was never a man to take indulgent views of his own

conduct ; he could not now find comfort in the reflection that he was going to express his honest convictions about the present agitation, for he knew that he was being paid a price for this ; and he did not tell himself that he was facing the ordeal for the sake of Kathleen, to gain the means of saving her and her family, for he knew that this was not the reason. Horace Croker could have done that for her. It was that he might win her for himself that he was doing it. He had no glow of exultation to brace him for the contest. He went into it despising himself,—cold, isolated, but with dogged determination.

As he neared the town he overtook a few late-comers on foot, and one or two vehicles passed him. Among the latter was a carriage drawn by a pair of grey horses with green rosettes in their bridles. In it were two ladies in whose attire the national colour was again conspicuous. One of them looked curiously at Connor as they went by, but his eyes were on the ground, and he did not know that it was Lady Desmond who had passed. The fighting was over, and the people were crowding towards the platform when the unexpected visitors drew up, attracting universal attention ; and indeed the grand equipage and the men on the box with powdered hair presented a curious spectacle in the midst of that collection of outside cars and donkey-carts. Amazement was followed by a burst of applause when the green ribbands told their story, and it was seen that a new and distinguished supporter had been won to the national cause. The beautiful lady who sat like a queen bowing in acknowledgment of the cheers was regarded with enthusiastic admiration, and respect for her tempered the ridicule which

might otherwise have greeted her English servants. It was in hushed tones that the powdered hair was criticised.

‘Whisper!’ asked one who was really curious, ‘is it insect powder?’ while another explained that it was put on to match the horses, and that mahogany-coloured paint was used when they drove chestnuts.

The proceedings had already begun when Connor entered the crowd. The parish priest was saying a few words of a non-controversial nature, bidding the people be true to their faith and their leaders. Desmond, Mr. Regan, and a couple of Members of Parliament, an American delegate, the newspaper reporters, and about a dozen others, old Mr. Desmond among them, were on the platform. Connor was recognised on all sides, and a way made for him until he reached the front of the crowd. Here he was seen by friends on the platform, and at the conclusion of the parish priest’s remarks he was called by name, and beckoned to a seat among Mr. Regan’s supporters. A cheer from the people greeted him as he ascended the steps—hostile groans would have been sweeter to him—and the hatefulness of his position was emphasised by the welcome he received on the platform. His brother’s face was lightened with the pleasure of a happy surprise in the belief that Connor’s affection and loyalty had triumphed over his personal views on a detail of policy. His father also looked genuinely pleased, and Mr. Regan somewhat ostentatiously offered his hand, an honour which the young man contrived to avoid by bowing coldly and taking his seat. He was desperately nervous. He felt stifled by the consciousness of his false position. Hostility would have aroused his spirit and given him strength; but in all that crowd

there was not a man who did not regard him as a friend, a supporter of Mr. Regan ; not one who would understand or could tolerate the scruples which divided him from his brother in his present policy. A sense of his isolation chilled him as he looked at the people and listened to the cheers with which they were hailing Desmond's speech. He hardly heard his brother's words. He waited, miserably aware that presently he himself would be standing before that assemblage of his neighbours and countrymen, not knowing how to find words to deliver his message, and condemned by every person there. There were two ways in which he might carry out his task : he might contrive to fulfil his uncle's conditions, and yet make a speech in which his dissent from Mr. Regan's policy might be almost hidden in a veil of patriotic ardour ; or he might make his statement without attempting to modify its effect. The temptation to choose the former course came to him, and he recognised it as a temptation. It showed him that his courage was shaken, and of that he was ashamed. It is at such moments as these, when a man has not even the support of his conscience in the difficult course, that his very soul is tested ; for even more divine than the sense of duty itself is that voice which bids a man be true to his manhood on the rare occasions when these two are not one. Connor knew that he had acted ignobly and for personal interests in opposing his brother publicly ; he also knew that having done so he would be thrice shamed if he did not fight the battle with all his strength, that it was a better thing to fight bravely in the wrong cause than timidly in the right. He made his supreme effort, determined to seek no shelter, and shrink from no consequences. He would fight now for the honour

of fighting ; and with this resolution the very magnitude of his trial became a stimulus to his courage, and with a glow of pride he felt that, whether Kathleen O'Brien was to be won or lost, he had faced for the chance of winning her the greatest ordeal he could imagine possible for him. For a few moments, remembering Kathleen, he forgot his surroundings ; they grew real to him again in the burst of cheering which followed Michael Desmond's brief speech. As Connor looked at the stern handsome face of the man who had always been, and still remained, his hero, the leader he longed to serve, as he remembered the bond which had been between them since his childhood, the pain of his position became more acute than ever. He longed to prove his affection and loyalty, he was stirred by the old enthusiasm, and he was the only man who was silent in that cheering crowd. Nevertheless, he no longer flinched from his trial, and the pride of his race told him that, though he might not be forgiven by his brother or his father for what he did, he might so bear himself as to escape their contempt.

Mr. Regan immediately followed Desmond. He spoke at length, intemperately and without eloquence, his speech consisting chiefly of abuse of the Government and the landlords. He deplored the present impossibility of open rebellion, maintained that the landlords were aliens without right in the soil, and counselled the withholding of rents as a practical means of compelling a reformation of the whole land tenure of the country. He was heard gladly—indeed any nominee of Desmond was sure of a warm welcome—and the extreme views which he expressed were not likely to find opposition in an excited crowd. But the exaggeration, the unjust abuse, and the whole tone

of the speaker's address excited Connor's disgust, and, added to his personal contempt for the man, did much to nerve him to strike his blow when the time came.

As the shouts which hailed the termination of Mr. Regan's speech died away, Connor at once rose. On the platform at least this was unexpected, as it had been arranged that one of the Members of Parliament present was to speak next. Glances were exchanged. Desmond looked pleased. The Duhallow Court carriage, which was about to depart, was stopped by a signal from Lady Desmond, who looked with interest at the new speaker. Blind Tom Begley, standing beside the platform, was heard to inquire who came forward, and his comment, 'Oh, Masther Connor, good luck to him! Ye'll hear God's truth from him,' reached the young man's ears as he stood looking out on the mass of eager faces.

The burst of cheering with which his appearance was received was the most disconcerting introduction he could have found; but though he was pale he showed little nervousness—indeed one of the newspapers in its description next morning of the meeting spoke of the effrontery of his attitude and his callous disregard for the feelings of his venerable father who was present. What he said in his speech he never clearly remembered. The accounts which appeared in the papers differed a good deal, and, indeed, after his opening remarks there was so much interruption that a connected report was almost impossible. 'There are some of us in Ireland at the present time,' he began, 'who love our country, and are staunch Home Rulers, but believe that the policy which Mr. Regan has recommended to you is unworthy of a great cause. I am here to-day, not to support Mr. Regan, but to oppose him.' According to one newspaper this

declaration was received in dead silence, and the report said it was almost pathetic to see the distress which gradually showed itself on the countenances of the people when they perceived that one whom they believed to be a trusted friend proved to be a traitor. The passage in his speech which followed, in which he begged the people to keep their noble cause unstained by injustice, and exhorted them not to imitate the wrongs which had been committed against them in the past by abusing the freedom they had won, was not repeated in the Nationalist papers, but was unctuously belauded in those of the opposite party. 'The speaker proceeded,' said one of the former, 'to cover his defection by lecturing his party, with a fine mixture of hypocrisy and effrontery, on the purity of its motives, and having succeeded in producing a feeling of disgust in his audience he won their ridicule by completely breaking down.' The latter organs, after stating that he expressed his views clearly and boldly and held his ground to the end, reported that he was at last prevented from proceeding by interruption which came, not from the people who were silent and impressed, but from the platform.

There was some truth in both reports. The distressed silence of the audience was becoming almost more than Connor could bear, when the interruption behind him restored his fighting power. 'Shame,' 'Traitor,' 'Government spy,' were shouted, and at last Mr. Regan, rushing to the front of the platform, cried, 'How long will you listen to this?'

Connor got no further. Every one on the platform was on his feet and the silence of the crowd was broken. 'Government spy,' 'Government informer,' shouted an infuriated politician, and soon the people took up the cry. 'A traitor in the

camp,' roared Mr. Regan. 'Turn him out of your town, boys'; and a band of young men belonging to one of the hurly clubs pressed forward to the platform as though to carry out the proposal. There was confusion everywhere, and it began to look as if Connor might be roughly handled. Then Michael Desmond came forward.

'Sit down, gentlemen,' he said to those around him. He was perfectly cool and looked almost unconcerned. The moment he raised his arm there was silence in the crowd. 'I know,' he said, 'that my brother spoke the truth when he told you that he had the cause of Ireland at heart and was on our side. He has acted unwisely in insisting on the points where he disagrees with Mr. Regan, and he will be sorry for it. Mr. Regan is too sure of your confidence to allow a young man's impetuous words to disturb him, and I know that you will show your confidence in him and me by voting for him to a man when the day comes. As to my brother, gentlemen, if his generosity to our enemies looks like disloyalty to his friends I ask you to forgive him, and accept my assurance that there is not a man here who loves his country more truly.'

Connor had expected his brother's contempt and repudiation. The generous words he spoke to the people cut him to the heart. He rose as Michael sat down, and turning in his direction bowed and descended the steps of the platform. The ranks of the crowd opened and made a passage for him. There was a significant silence. Another speaker had come forward on the platform, but no one was listening to him; all eyes were turned on the young man who passed between them with bent head, making no attempt to carry himself either proudly

or defiantly. 'For God's sake, Masther Connor, go back and tell them you didn't mane it,' one man said as he went by; but no hostile word assailed him.

He had faced and accomplished the task he had undertaken, but he left the meeting with feelings more near to the humiliation of defeat than the exaltation of victory.

On his way from Mallow, Connor had left his portmanteau at the Ballyvodra lodge, with a message to say he would be returning in the evening. As he walked homeward, the brother and the lover in him in turn had possession of his heart; and, at first, the pain of the scene he had just been through overshadowed the joy of seeing Kathleen again with his task fulfilled. In the bitterness of that hour he saw himself separated from those who were serving their country, constrained to remain silent and allow himself to be identified with the opponents of the national cause. In vain he told himself that he had expressed his honest conviction, for he knew he had done so not with the interests of his country at heart but to gain his own ends, and he knew that what he had done would damage his brother and give his enemies a pretext for speaking of disunion in the party. His brother's words, his generous defence of him before the people when he felt that he had deserved his contempt and repudiation, kindled all his old loyalty and affection for his hero. He longed to prove his devotion to him, and he saw no way of doing it. He had taken his stand against his party's present policy, and for him there was now no turning back, and for Michael no compromise. The secret knowledge of his motives in coming forward at the meeting oppressed him. He wondered

what Kathleen would think of it if she were told. Would a girl condemn a man for having acted thus for love of her? Not if she loved him. The thought of posing before her heroically was intolerable to him. The truth of his love for her compelled him to trust her, and he made up his mind to tell her everything. With that resolution something of rest came to his troubled spirit.

It was a golden autumn evening, and in the contrast to the noisy activity of the little town the Sabbath peace of the country was the more marked. The roadside cottages were deserted, except here and there where an old woman sat half-asleep in a doorway, or a child in charge of some goats stood on an adjoining bank. In the little oatfields the crows were feeding undisturbed among the piled sheaves, cows undriven came up from the river to their milking places, and the roads were empty of wayfarers.

About half-way between Buttevant and Ballyvodra the Duhallow Court carriage overtook Connor, and at a signal from Lady Desmond was stopped.

'May I be neighbourly and offer you a lift, Mr. Desmond?' she said pleasantly.

'It is very kind of you, Lady Desmond,' he replied, 'but—' he hesitated and added with a laugh, 'walking is good for me just now.'

'Oh yes,' she said, 'I quite understand. I was intensely interested in the meeting. I thought you might be tired, but you must promise to come over and call on me soon. You will find my sympathies as Irish as you could wish them.'

The sudden appearance and departure of the beautiful lady, and some speculation about her motives in attending the meeting, distracted Connor's

attention for a few moments, but she was hardly lost to sight before his thoughts reverted to his own affairs. And now, as he drew nearer to Ballyvodra and Kathleen, the hopes and fears of the lover banished all other emotions. His fears were those of every true lover who holds his lady the greatest prize the world has to give and himself unworthy of it. His own altered position and Kathleen's attitude at their last meeting gave him good reason for hope. It was as a friend, as a brother, not as a lover, that he had begged her to let him help her, but nevertheless she knew that he was her lover. Though she had not accepted his offer she had not refused, and hope whispered again that she would at once have done so, knowing that he loved her, if she also knew that it was impossible to return his love.

He had now won the position to give him a right to try and win her ; but she was not won. That glorious adventure which was to give him his heart's desire or leave him in a barren world was now before him. His spirit kindled at the prospect : he did not think of failure. For years he had been compelled to be a passive lover ; now all the restrained passion of his love was urgent for expression. He dreamed of the winning of her ; dreamed that the girl—the lightest touch of whose hand thrilled him, while his had won from her only the frank confidence of friendship—was in his arms at last, the comrade still, but how much nearer for the new-born reserve that comes with love. He dreamed that she was won, and made pictures of the future. It might be necessary to leave the neighbourhood until the present trouble had blown over. Directly he had made arrangements for relieving her family of their difficulties he would take her away with him—it

mattered not where, the world was theirs. For a while they would make a new home and find rest far away, and by-and-by they would return again to the old Duhallow country.

He had struck into the fields on the slopes above Ballyvodra and looked down on the little river and the belts of woods sheltering the house. Kathleen herself was coming towards him. Connor saw and recognised her in the distance. He stood still for a moment, and then hurried on with a beating heart. He was almost afraid to meet her : the girl he had dreamed of had been his, the girl herself was still unwon. Had she guessed he was coming that way, or was their meeting an accident? Had her reflections during the week that had passed since he had told her of his love pleaded for him or against him? He hurried on, fearing, yet eager to know, and feeling that at last the hour had come when all uncertainty would be at an end. She was walking slowly, and did not quicken her pace as they drew nearer, nor wave a signal in return for his. He saw, the moment he caught sight of her face, that she was in trouble, but that did not discourage him ; he dreaded nothing so much as the frank smile of comradeship, which seemed in her a charm to keep love withal at arm's length.

'Oh, Kathleen,' he said, 'tis you yourself ! I mean I have been thinking about you so much since I saw you last, that now you are really here I can hardly believe it.'

'I heard you were at the meeting, Connor. Your uncle told me. I wanted to see you.' She spoke with constraint, her eyes fixed on the ground.

'Oh, that meeting !' he exclaimed ; 'I have got it over. It had to be done. I'll tell you all the

reasons another time. I spoke against Regan, and you know what that means—a breach with Michael. Don't speak of it now. I want to forget everything about it except that I was fighting on your side.'

'On my side!' she echoed. 'Did you—did Michael disown you before the people?'

'He excused me. He defended me,' said Connor. Her cheek flushed.

'I felt like a traitor,' he went on, 'but God knows I was true to my country and true to you, Kathleen. Oh, my dearest, I cannot hide anything from you. I cannot pretend that it was friendship that made me do what I have done to win the means of helping you.'

She was walking at his side, and turning towards her as he spoke he was dismayed to see the utter misery of her expression.

'What is it, dear?' he said gently. 'Have I said too much? Have I spoken too soon? Let me wait, then, and be your friend still.'

Her eyes filled, the tears ran down her cheeks as she looked at him and tried to speak.

'Don't, Connor,' she said brokenly. 'Don't say such things. Oh, how can I tell you? I didn't know you cared so much.'

He felt chilled with a premonition of disaster. 'What is it you have to tell me, Kathleen?' he asked quickly.

'Connor, dear, dear old boy, I cannot give you the love you ask for.'

'Not now,' he said eagerly, 'but some day perhaps. I have waited a long time, and I can wait still.'

They had come to a gate on their path, and he stood facing her without attempting to open it. Her paleness and the look in her eyes alarmed him, and he forgot his own pain at the sight of hers.

'I see,' he said. 'It's a friend you want now, and only a friend. I can be that to you.'

'Oh, if that were possible, Connor, and I might still love you as I have always loved you; but it is impossible, and I don't deserve your love.' Her lips trembled, and with a great effort she forced herself to speak. 'Connor, I have given my love and I have given my promise.'

The shot that strikes the vital part may give no pain, and for the moment a man may hardly know that he is wounded.

'What!' Connor exclaimed mechanically. 'To Horace Croker?'

'No,' she answered, 'to Michael.'

Then Connor felt like a man who has received his death-wound. He leant against the gate and covered his face with his hands. Kathleen stood at his side, her eyes blinded with tears, her only thought the pain of the friend she loved so dearly and had wounded so deeply. She came closer to him and laid her hand on his shoulder. 'Oh, Connor,' she said, 'tell me that you forgive me,' and as he raised his head and turned to her she flung her arms round his neck and drew his head down to her and kissed him.

The next moment he was gone and she remained standing at the gate, robbed for the time of all the new joy that love had brought into her life by the thought of the sorrow which it had brought into Connor's. He was dearer to her than she herself knew.

With one exception the Nationalist papers in their accounts of the meeting, in obedience to Desmond's instructions, made little of Connor's in-

trusion, while those of the opposite party called special attention to it. It was with the keenest satisfaction that Mr. Barrington read the headlines to the column of description in a Cork journal on the morning after the meeting. 'Split in the Nationalist ranks.' 'A divided camp.' 'Plain speech from Mr. Connor Desmond,' stood out boldly before his delighted eyes. He had won his victory, he had triumphed over his sister, he had found in his heir a supporter of his own views. He felt that Connor had been tried almost too severely, he rejoiced in the prospect of the reward which awaited him. Mr. Barrington had concluded his business in Dublin with the speed which wealth allows. He was now in possession of all the Ballyvodra mortgages, and these he was about to hand to his nephew directly they met. He expected to see him during the day, or at latest on the following morning ; but while he was still complacently waiting for his arrival Connor was already far away from his native place, resolved in the bitterness of his pain that it should see his face no more.

CHAPTER XX

THE FÊTE AT DUHALLOW COURT

THE reappearance of Lady Desmond at Duhallow was the immediate cause of Michael's proposal to Kathleen. The presence of the fascinating lady awoke disquieting memories, and he was angry with himself that he should be disturbed or find himself thinking of her with anything but indifference. Though by every tradition of the relations between the sexes the shame was hers, not his, it nevertheless befell that in thinking of her he was aware of a curious reversal of the accepted order of things, and was conscious, not of having made a conquest, but of having suffered a defeat—a humiliation to be erased only in contempt for the woman who could make this thing possible. She presented herself to his imagination as the embodiment of all that was beguiling and untrue in woman, as the corroboration of her own cynical estimate of her sex.

To turn from her to Kathleen was to know that there was at all events an exception. Unscrupulous himself, his faith in her true nature gave him back the lost dreams of his boyhood ; the thought of her love brought him a sense of rest. She gave him a new outlook on life. His mother had influenced his youth ; by her the ambition of his career had been

inspired, but no one had hitherto influenced his manhood ; he had gone his own way pursuing a definite object, careless of the opinion of friend or enemy. He had been attracted by women—in the case of Corinna all the passion of his nature had been aroused—but he had not loved. Now, with youth left behind him, a feeling of the springtime of life came back to him with Kathleen ; a belief that the old dreams might be realised, and his whole life's work ennobled by devotion to one brave-hearted girl.

He had won her with a word. He had been her hero, distantly worshipped, and the moment he declared himself as her lover she was ready to give him her whole allegiance. Easy victories in love are allowed to the hero ; but when a maiden's imagination has been captivated by heroic qualities in a man he must prepare to stand the test of close inspection. He must remain her hero if he would possess her heart. Their engagement, at his wish, was to remain for a time a secret. He had political reasons, which he frankly explained, for desiring this. At the moment his alliance with the daughter of a Protestant landlord would be unpopular, and might be used to his prejudice by a section of his own party whose loyalty was doubtful. Kathleen readily concurred ; indeed, the arrangement was a welcome one, for she also had the feelings of her father and her family to consider. Her whole outlook on life was suddenly changed. While her love gave Desmond a sense of repose, she was herself excited and restless. Him whom she loved she must follow ; his hopes must be her hopes, his people her people ; yet how could she forsake her own ? He was the enemy of her class, she must stand by his side, yet how could she forget the faiths she had held ? Peradventure her love

might influence him and help to bring reconciliation where there had been hostility—but that was a dream. Meanwhile she must follow him whithersoever he led. He was her hero, her lover, and she longed to serve him. His personal magnetism had made men feel the like; it made the girl who worshipped him restless that she could not prove her love in some act of devotion. She dreamed day and night of these things.

Horace Croker took his defeat at the polls and his rejection by Kathleen like a good sportsman. He decided that the constituency was unworthy of him, and he unworthy of the lady. Mr. O'Brien was bitterly disappointed; he had built new hopes for the future on the prospect of Kathleen's marriage, and with their collapse he became gloomy and irritable. Mr. Barrington found an opportunity of suggesting to him that the reason of Kathleen's refusal of Croker might be found in her attachment to Connor Desmond, whom, he took care to add, he had decided to make his heir. But Mr. O'Brien listened impatiently; the name of Desmond had grown hateful to him; and it was one of Kathleen's new troubles that her father, who had hitherto forbore to speak ill of the man who had saved her life, constantly denounced him as the chief instrument of his ruin.

Desmond saw her trouble and understood it, and was troubled himself.

'Oh, Michael,' she said to him at one of their short stolen interviews, 'I have made your cause mine, and therefore I am not afraid to plead the cause of those who will think I have deserted them. You might be their leader too.'

'My sweetheart is trying to convert me already,' he laughed.

‘You might win them.’

‘No,’ he replied ; ‘but if ever a chance of reconciliation should seem possible, I will remember your faith in me and try and prove my love for you.’

She could ask for nothing more ; and that hope of love given by her to the enemy of her people, coming back again to her people in the healing of strife, was a light on her path in these dark days.

Sir Henry and Lady Desmond had been called on by the county, and had given a garden-party at the Court. Sir Henry had then gone to his grouse moor in Scotland—his wife remaining at Duhallow with her mother and her old school-friend, the Comtesse de Prayon, as companions. Sir Henry’s secretary, Mr. Severn, also delayed his departure, partly with the object of discussing the resources of the property with the agent, and partly because he had the misfortune to be in love with Lady Desmond.

Corinna began at once to show a special interest in the welfare of the people, and her growing popularity was established beyond question by her sympathy with the national cause and her appearance at the Buttevant meeting. Her next experiment was the organisation of a great fête for all the people of the neighbourhood in the grounds of Duhallow Court. No such entertainment had been thought of in that countryside within the memory of man, and for a week beforehand nothing else was talked of. A few months previously Sir Henry’s name had been held in contempt ; now it was loudly applauded ; and Tom Begley, remembering his verses on the rebuilding of the Court, was busy with a revised version for production on the day of the gathering. Invitations were sent out to all classes ; but from the gentry, who were offended at Corinna’s open sympathy with

their opponents, there were few acceptances. The O'Briens were asked, but they refused; Michael Desmond was asked, and he also declined.

The invitation to Desmond had a significance known only to the sender and the recipient. It was the first communication between them since their parting before Corinna's marriage.

'DEAR MR. DESMOND,' she wrote, 'I shall be very grateful to you if you will come to the entertainment I am giving on the 23rd to the people—to your people. Now I have come to live among them I am very anxious to help them, and I thought before attempting anything serious it would be best to have a merry-making. Your presence would do what nothing else could do to make it a success, and would help me in every way.—Very sincerely yours,

CORINNA DESMOND.'

This letter Michael read and re-read with peculiar interest. On the face of it, it suggested a desire on her part to renew acquaintance with him on an understanding that the past was to be ignored or forgotten, and he could see that as they were almost certain to meet sooner or later it might be a relief to her that it should be at once, and in the conventional way she proposed. It might have been expected that his feelings of chivalry would have inclined him to meet her wishes, and that in view of his relationship to Kathleen he might have been glad for his own sake to raise a barrier of a conventional friendliness between the past and the present. But stronger than any such feeling was that of unforgiveness, and self-love made him resent her easy assumption of forgetfulness. Enough of her fascination still troubled him to make him wish to punish her. A whisper of the fancy that she might be less indifferent to him than the letter suggested—there were rumours that she and

Sir Henry were not on cordial terms—was pleasing to his vanity, and yet he was not vain enough to entertain it. The possibility, however, of this being the case was an equally good reason why he should not renew acquaintance with her. As to the invitation, he rejected an inclination to leave it unanswered lest she should fancy he retained for her any other feeling than indifference, and he was satisfied that in his brief and courteous reply she could find nothing to indicate that he had the least interest in her.

The incident, however, did not end with the writing and delivery of the letter. The evening before the fête found Desmond still uncertain as to whether he should go or not, and it was no longer a letter to which he was considering the reply, but the memory of a spoken entreaty. That morning, in the village street, Corinna, accompanied by Mr. Severn, had met him. He had bowed to her and passed on, but a moment later she had left her companion and was at his side.

‘Oh,’ she cried, ‘be generous! let us be friends! It can cost you so little, and it means so much to me. Do not let the people think you despise me. I am very unhappy. Please, please come to-morrow.’

She was gone before he could reply, and, though prompt decision was habitual with him, the evening had come and he still hesitated. It was her fascination which made him hesitate. If he had felt indifferent to her charms he could easily have complied with her wish; but she attracted him still, and he was angry with himself for being attracted by the woman he despised. He had almost forgotten the witchery of her beauty which had conquered him once until she stood close at his side again, and he saw her pleading eyes and trembling lips. ‘Curse the witch,’ he

muttered, 'she's lovelier than ever, and less to be trusted'; and 'Perhaps she is speaking the truth, perhaps she *is* unhappy,' was his other reflection.

He could not have said whether it was the attraction of the witch or the desire to behave kindly to an unhappy lady that made him finally decide to look in at the entertainment next day.

The fête justified all expectations, and the hostess won the admiration of every one. A radiant figure, gaily attired, she went among the people, encouraging the contests, talking to those who seemed neglected, and making every one welcome. Those guests of her own class who had come in spite of her recent exhibition of political sympathy were her willing helpers. Colonel Spencer Boyle acted as starter in the races, Dr. Riordan as judge. The young men became voluntary waiters, and their sisters joined in the children's games. They had the pleasant prospect of a merry supper-party at the Court after the dancing in the great tent, which was to bring the entertainment to a close, had commenced.

Lady Desmond had just distributed the prizes for the sports, and was standing in the centre of a little group of her friends when Desmond appeared. Mr. Severn, the only person who observed her critically, noticed the flush which sprung to her face, but their greeting had the easy familiarity of old acquaintance.

Desmond exchanged formal bows with some of his neighbours, shook hands cordially with Father Barry, and was introduced to Mrs. Temple-Cloud and the Countess. Old Dr. Riordan, the only man in the parish who was on terms of familiarity with him, began at once to chaff him about his late arrival.

'And you missed all the best of the fun, man,' said he. 'We're after having a tug-of-war that

would beat all the election fights that you ever saw in your life. The men who live on this side of the river against those on the other side, and nothing would satisfy them but they would have the river between them, just below there where it isn't very deep. Twenty a side and a long rope and a flag in the middle of the river for goal. Such a pull you never saw, till at last the men beyond the river got the grip of the others and had half-a-dozen of them in the water and well on to the flag when Jemmy Shaughnessy went under, and he still holding on to the rope. "I'm drowned," says he, as he went under ; but he stuck to it, and one of the others that was down got his feet under a boulder, and sat there in the river-bed with his head just out, and divil an inch could they move 'em beyond that till the men beyond let the rope go slack for a moment, and under went the lot. If the other fellows won the prize, 'twas these got the whisky to keep the cold out of their wet bodies, so all were satisfied.'

'I see your party has been a thorough success, Lady Desmond,' said Michael, joining in the laughter which greeted the doctor's description of the encounter.

'There wasn't such a day in Duhallow for years,' said Father Barry, 'and 'twill be long remembered.'

'How could we fail with such guests?' Corinna agreed merrily. 'They won't let me fail. They don't need to be entertained. They are guests that enter into partnership with their hosts. The more I see of them the more the good manners of your people delight me, Mr. Desmond.'

'And that blind man's poetry!' exclaimed the Countess.

'Oh, Tom Begley! he's a great fellow,' cried the

doctor. 'He delivered his poem just before the prizes were distributed. He has you in it too, Desmond, my boy, sure enough. What's this he called you? Britain's terror, Erin's pride?

He freed us from worse bonds than the Egyptians.

How's this it went?'

'But not from Dr. Riordan's prescriptions.'

Desmond capped him.

'And that's the fellow,' laughed the doctor, 'I pulled through the measles. But how did the verses go? Can't any one give me a help? Oh, I have a bit of it now:—

'Twas he from the Egyptians' yoke unbound us,
But *she* hath cast the bonds of love around us.
Great is the name of Desmond, and we trust her,
Since she has taken it, to guard its lustre,
Which now to prove she gave a noble fête,
With dancing, whisky, prizes, and cold mate.

Oh, but I've forgotten all the rest of it. I take exception to his flattery of our friend here, but we can all endorse his praises of our hostess.'

'The dancing's beginning,' said Corinna, 'I hear the fiddling. We might have a look at it for a few minutes, and then it will be time for us to think about having some supper ourselves.' She kept Desmond at her side on the way to the dancing tent. 'I need not tell you how grateful I am,' she said. 'When can I have a few moments' talk with you? After supper? You will come back with us?'

'No, Lady Desmond, I am going now. Again let me thank you for the interest you are taking in the people and our cause.'

He offered her his hand in farewell, but she did not take it.

'I will walk a little way with you,' she said, turning. 'I suppose you will take the river-path.'

For a little while they walked without speaking. She was very pale, and he, contrary to his calculations, found himself agitated by her presence.

'I suppose that was the place where they had the tug-of-war,' he remarked as they came to the river-side.

'Oh yes, I suppose so,' she said absently; and then she turned to him suddenly with flashing eyes. 'Are you trying to build up a barrier of formality between us?' she cried. 'Oh, Michael, for God's sake don't be cruel!'

In the sternness of his face was written, not his disapprobation of her words, but his effort to repress his own emotion.

'I should have thought,' he answered, 'that I was taking the kindest and wisest course possible.'

'Oh,' she said, 'that it were a year ago, and that we were walking again across the country on that windy afternoon! Oh that we could have our time again, and take the right path instead of the wrong!'

He imagined her conscience to be reproaching her with their secret, and replied, 'Our hope is always in the path before us. We have forgotten the wrong turning of yesterday.'

'Forgotten it!' she echoed. 'You don't understand me. It is not my love for you I regret; it is my madness in marrying another. You may not regret that I did so. The burden is mine.'

He was taken aback by her confession. A glow of triumph swept through him and was followed by a throb of pain. He turned to her without speaking, unable to speak. As he looked in her face,

proud in her humiliation, no longer pale but flushed with shame, he was conscious that a new conflict, fiercer than any his soul had known before, had begun within him.

She was the first to speak. 'I cannot tell you now,' she said, 'why I acted as I did when I fled from you. I must,—you must let me try to explain, if it is possible to explain, why I did so. I cannot now. But you will give me a chance.'

'No,' he answered, 'it is better not'; but there was no finality in his tone.

'You will,' she said, 'you will; I know you will! You are too great, too strong a man to punish a woman you loved once. Good-bye now. Good-bye, Michael!'

She gave him her hand, and, as he held it in his, their eyes met, and a wild thrill born of a flash of mutual memory went through them both. Again she flushed; but as they parted her manner changed, her face was bright with a smile, and there was laughter in her voice as she turned and called after him, 'Oh, Mr. Desmond, I have forgotten half I wanted to say to you, but if by chance you care for a stroll to-morrow afternoon I shall be walking along the river-path towards the Castle about four o'clock. Good-bye. I must go and look after my guests.' She ran off without giving him time to answer, and he stood watching her with excited fancies and bewildered thoughts.

On his homeward walk his reflections were interrupted by a disagreeable incident. A man who appeared to have been waiting for him suddenly stood in his path, his hat in his hand, and addressed him in servile speech. Desmond recognised with a start of surprise and an exclamation of anger

the villainous features of Costello, the man he had defended in the Rahilly murder case.

'What are you doing here?' he said to him sternly. 'I thought you were in America.'

'America's a fine place,' said Costello, 'but who'd have a better right to be in Ireland than a poor man who came near swinging in the holy cause of his country? And swing he would if your honour hadn't defated his innemies and proved me innocent to the wurrelld.'

'Well, what is it you want?' asked Desmond roughly.

'Tis little enough, thin. What good is me life to me, what good is me honest ca-rachter that you proved to the jury, Misther Desmond, if me old neighbours turn their backs agin' me? Oh,' he went on in a cringing tone, 'tis your honour can do a little thing for me that'll make a poor pathriot respected in his own counthry as he should be by good rights. 'Tis that little farm of your honour's at Connux that's vacant next month that I'd ax you to put me into. 'Tis well I'd farm it, and if there was anny other ways of showing me respect and gratitude besides payin' me rint, indeed, thin, you'd find me ready to help the cause of the ould counthry when you wanted me.'

Desmond watched him while he was speaking with a look of intense disgust. 'Costello,' he said, 'you know my opinion of you quite well. After the trial I gave you money enough to pay your passage to America, and to get rid of you out of the neighbourhood I'll do so once more. The ticket will be in Father Barry's hands on Wednesday, and you can go to him for it.'

'Was it a ticket to America I was requiring?' asked Costello with sarcasm.

Desmond walked on, the man following close at his side.

'Now be off. I will have nothing more to do with you,' Michael said angrily.

'Is that the way you thrate the man who served your cause?' asked Costello.

'I wish to God I'd let them hang you as you deserved,' said Desmond.

'Faith,' said Costello coolly, 'for that matter I always felt 'twas a sort of partnership job between you and me.'

'Go to hell!' cried Desmond, swinging his arm round and pushing Costello roughly aside.

He acted unwisely, and contrary to his usual deliberate methods, in dealing with the ruffian. He was a man whose enmity it might be dangerous to arouse, and in the look which he gave Desmond at that moment hatred was written with horrid malignity.

CHAPTER XXI

THE TOWER IN THE MOONLIGHT

FOR the first time in his life Desmond was compelled to recognise a struggle between good and evil in his soul. He had lived uninterrogated by his conscience, following those lines of conduct which had seemed to him expedient or pleasant or fitted to the achievement of the ends he had in view. In his sight scruples existed for the weak, moral obligation for the timid : the strong man made his own commandments and was not afraid to break them. But sooner or later comes to every one a revelation of the powers of light and darkness ; and for Desmond there was now no question of balancing expediencies, but a clear perception of Right and Wrong — a definite compulsion to choose between them.

Kathleen O'Brien had altered his outlook on life. In the love she gave him and in the love she had won from him his whole view as to the relationship between man and woman had been corrected, and yet the fascination of one whom he did not love called him from his allegiance. Every noble quality he possessed, the same spirit of devotion which had made him ardent in the service of his country, bade him be true to the girl who had inspired his love ; while the weakness which he had thought his

strength, the outcome of a thousand victories of self over principle, held him in bondage to an unchivalrous passion. Right and Wrong, clearly defined, confronted him at last, and he did not attempt to shut his eyes to his responsibility. As to his previous relationship with Corinna he had no accusations of conscience. The passion which had then overmastered him had been that of the lover who desired nothing so much as to wed the woman who evoked it. Now that woman was another man's wife, and he loved her no longer. Now he loved a girl who had given him her whole heart and trusted him implicitly.

He remained in a state of uncertainty as to whether he would meet Corinna, up to a short time before the hour in the afternoon which she had named. In vain did he tell himself that he was secure in his love of Kathleen from any danger of falling under the spell of Corinna's influence: his desire to meet her proclaimed his danger. Their relationship had a morbid attraction for him. Once he believed that he had won her; she had placed herself completely in his power; she had then incomprehensibly rejected him; and now she let him see that instead of wishing the past to be forgotten she cherished its memory. He was utterly unable to understand what her motives had been in throwing him over after she had given herself to him, and he was curious to have some explanation from her own lips. Her conduct gave her a lurid fascination, and an element of cruelty entered into the passion which her attitude of self-surrender had rekindled. The desire to see her, to enter into temptation with the intention of resisting it, grew stronger the more he allowed his thoughts to dwell

on her, and at the same time he knew that his only honourable course was to avoid, not to approach, that temptation.

The Right and the Wrong confronted him. Had he the power to choose between them? Modern philosophy would say 'No,' would tell us that his action would be the result of agencies beyond his control—of circumstances, and the qualities he had inherited from his ancestors; that while seeming to exercise his will-power on one side or the other, he was really obeying the commands of inevitable laws. And yet, however reasonable the philosophy may appear, we are not convinced. An instinct stronger than any logic tells every man at critical moments of his life, when good and evil are clearly shown to him, that he himself stands separate from circumstances, separate from his own inherited or acquired qualities, a soul that claims kinship with a power superior to law and capable of being true or untrue to itself. This critical moment had arrived in Desmond's life. Though a thousand outside influences drew him this way or that, though the temperament he had inherited, the character which the years had shaped, chose the field of battle, his very self grew distinct from these in conscious power of captaincy. Though the easy victories which his own desires in the past had won made the fight for what he knew to be his duty a thousand times harder, he felt that if he failed it would not be because the task was too great, but because he deliberately refused to make the choice which it was his to make.

He failed, and failed as other strong men have done, by taking the wrong step which he thinks may allow of return. To see Corinna, to face the

temptation with the intention of resisting it, was the fatal step; and, while he took it, while he assured himself that their interview should be one which should leave his loyalty to Kathleen unstained, he knew that he had disobeyed that divine voice which is the freedom of the soul, and that he had made his choice for evil and subjection.

It was a cloudless afternoon of autumn, lighting brilliant foregrounds of coloured woodland and golden cornfields among grey limestone walls, and veiling the mountain horizons in soft haze. Corinna, dressed in white with ribbands of pale gold, and blue cornflowers in her straw hat, seemed, like the soft air, to claim the autumn day for summer; and her beautiful face, untouched by any shade of anxiety, was radiant as the sunshine around her. From her manner of greeting Desmond they might have been old friends and comrades without a thought to disguise or a feeling to repress; and he, at first constrained in speech and self-conscious, speedily found ease in the initiative of her fine acting. She took his coming for granted, and spoke as though it were the most natural thing in the world for them to be together again.

‘This is just the afternoon for a walk,’ she said, ‘and I wish I had more time, but some of my guests are leaving this afternoon and I must get back to say good-bye. I should like to have gone exactly the same way we went the last time we had a walk together—across the fields towards Kilcolman.’

‘Anywhere,’ said he.

‘Now what does that mean?’ Corinna laughed. ‘That you are in a mood of indifference, or are so pleased with the weather and the company that every direction is equally good.’

‘Well, let us take the old path,’ he answered, ‘and see how it looks in a new light. You remember how it was blowing that afternoon. You had to battle with the wind.’

‘And with you. Yes, I remember.’

He gave her his hand in crossing the river by the plank bridge, part of the rail of which was broken, and he noticed that she wore her wedding-ring but no other. This little token brought home to him with a curious emphasis the change which their relationship had undergone since the last time he had been in that place with her. She continued to talk lightly; and the absence of any attempt on his part to do more than respond to her lead began to suggest that he was there at her bidding, and threw on her the whole task of referring to the past, or by ignoring it of seeking to establish a new understanding between them which cancelled the past. He could not guess what was in her mind; but, apart from his strong desire to know the real state of her feelings, his instincts as a gentleman called upon him to relieve her of the burden of meeting the situation unhelped. In assuming that she desired to establish a relationship which ignored the past, and by giving their talk a turn in that direction, he for a moment credited himself with a step towards that moral victory which he had come out assuring himself he was to win.

‘Well!’ he began. ‘A good deal has happened to both of us since we last came this way. We have chosen our paths and learned our lessons; but I hope we are as good friends as ever.’

She gave him a quick glance, and, almost to his surprise—so different was her manner from that of

the previous day—responded gaily in the spirit of his suggestion.

‘Of course,’ she said. ‘I have always counted on you as my friend. We have always understood each other. And haven’t I shown my allegiance?—I mean politically. I am heart and soul with you and your cause, and eager to help you where I can.’

‘I am not ungrateful,’ he replied.

‘But how I envy you!’ she went on with animation. ‘Not in your leadership—that is yours alone—but in having a cause in which you can throw all your strength, a country you can love. I am English, but do I love England? In a vague way I suppose I am proud of our traditions, but there is nothing in our prosperous Empire which wins my love as Ireland wins yours. I suppose my cause is the Liberal party, and for us Ireland is a political question : for you it is a faith. It might have been this for me too.’

A picture of what Corinna would have been as a comrade-in-arms if she had married him flashed across his imagination. For him Kathleen had abandoned her own cause ; but her heart was not in his.

‘Sir Henry Desmond is an English politician,’ he said coldly, with the deliberate purpose of suggesting that he understood her to feel the obligation of sharing her husband’s views ; and she, reading him well enough to see that he spoke with intent to wound, was glad of it, for there was nothing she desired less than his indifference.

‘Yes, I envy you,’ she repeated, disdaining to vindicate her independence. ‘To have a faith one can live or die for is to find happiness, whether it be in your country, or in God, or in man or woman.’

We are most of us without any of these. But come ! don't let me spoil our walk by gloomy reflections. I am ready to forget everything except the present. I am in a holiday mood.' She called his attention to a flock of golden plover, flashing black to white as they wheeled in their flight ; and with troubled hearts and preoccupied thoughts they spoke lightly for a while of the charm of the wild life of that country, and other things that concerned them little. She played her part so well that Desmond was in greater doubt than ever as to the state of her feelings towards himself. Looking at her as she walked at his side without a trace of self-consciousness in her manner he was filled with amazement, and found it almost impossible to realise that their relationship to each other was what it was, and that she had once given herself to him utterly,—that with a whisper he might set her cheeks aflame. He was not prepared for her easy assumption that the past was to be ignored, and the more this became apparent the more strongly did he feel the desire to claim the intimacy of their secret. He had never forgotten her beauty, though he had believed himself indifferent to it ; but now every flash of her eyes, every turn of her head, beguiled him again as it had done in the days when he had passionately longed to possess her.

If there were to be any reference to the past it seemed clear that she did not intend to be the first to make it, and for a time Desmond avoided the volcanic theme himself. They talked of the meeting at Buttevant, of Connor, and of the prospects of the Nationalist party in the coming session with apparent interest, while each of them wondered what thoughts the while were hidden in the other's heart. At last Corinna gave the word for return, pleading her duty

to her guests as an excuse, and at a quickened pace they set off homewards.

At the end of the next field she climbed a fence that stood in their path without his assistance, and jumped lightly into the field beyond.

'I remember doing that,' she said, 'in this very place a year ago on our first walk. It seems yesterday. Let us cancel the interval! Let us fancy it is the same walk!'

'Do you remember what we were talking about?' he asked significantly.

'Oh yes, very well,' she replied. 'You wanted me to be your wife, and I wanted you to be my friend. I told you I did not love you, and you asked me to let you try to make me love you, and I gave you leave to try. You were to have the whole afternoon for the task,' she laughed. 'I was not sure about my own feelings towards you, but I was convinced you did not love me. You were merely influenced by my attractions as a woman. I know all the signs. I have longed for love and not won it, and I have won admiration and loathed it. You did not love me, though possibly you thought you did.'

Her manner changed while she was speaking, and there was a note of real earnestness in her last words. They were generous, too, inasmuch as they permitted Desmond an escape from the humiliation of the rejected lover; but he did not take it.

'I don't believe you,' he said harshly, 'and I don't understand you. You know I loved you then.'

'Well,' she answered, recovering her irresponsible tone, 'perhaps we differ in what we mean by love, or I may have been wrong. Let us go on with our old walk. No, let us build castles in the air! It is amusing to think what might have been.'

'If you had married me?'

'Yes. Fancy we were married a year ago and have been parted ever since. It has been kept a secret and—to-day we have met again.'

She gave him a look in which coquetry was a veil to deep feeling, and his pulses quickened as he met it. He was falling under the spell of her witchery. The picture of Kathleen came to him and he dismissed it impatiently, stung by the reproach, as a man might dismiss an innocent child from his side when entering unholy places.

'It was a long time to wait,' she added, noting the impression she had made, 'but we had to keep the secret for political reasons. And you are glad to have me with you again?' She laughed gaily to lighten the significance of her words.

'Oh,' cried Desmond, 'what a witch you are! You show me the girl I lost. I am walking with her, not with you. She was brave and loyal and honest—and how beautiful! I am looking at her now and I see she is as beautiful as ever.'

'There is your old Castle tower shining in the sunlight,' she said. 'Is it there you would be taking me this evening?'

'Yes,' he replied. 'It is there I would be taking *her*—there among my own people. The fairest and bravest of women, the rose of the world, won from the camp or the enemy—a girl whose love would give a man new faith in women, new strength to serve his fellow-men. This is the bride I would have led to her new home.'

They had reached the wooden bridge across the river, and she stood leaning against the rail and looking into the water.

'And by-and-by when we were alone again

together,' she said musingly, 'when the night fell and the moonlight was on the river, there would be dear memories to recall and a whole year's store of love to claim.'

She looked up at him for a moment, and then turned her head again to the running stream.

'Tell me, Corinna, for God's sake,' he said with sudden passion, 'why you married Sir Henry Desmond.'

She was silent a moment and her colour rose. 'Because I distrusted your love for me and hated myself for loving you,' she answered. 'Because you made me despise myself in treating me as your captive, with my freedom gone, because I had given you my love. Because other women had been before at your mercy like me. Because I rebelled against the power which held me, the power which women have had to submit to from the beginning of the world. Because—I cannot put my madness into words—I cannot tell you now. I might in other circumstances make you understand.'

There was a tiny splash in the water. Apparently by accident, but in reality by her own contrivance, Corinna's wedding-ring slipped off her finger and disappeared among the stones in the river bed.

'Oh!' she cried, 'my ring has slipped off—my wedding-ring. But the water is not deep. Can you see it?'

She made a pretence of trying to discover it, and Desmond silently assisted. The clear water tinted with the gold stain of peat rippled over the rocks and pebbles of its bed, but the ring was not in sight.

'Show me the exact spot where it fell,' he said, 'and I will go in and see if it can be found.'

'Are you so anxious to find it?' she asked with

a curious laugh. 'It does not concern me so much. I have no superstitions. And you would probably get wet for nothing.' She walked on across the plank and he followed her. 'Now,' she continued, 'I think this is our parting-place. I must get back to say good-bye to my guests. When they have gone and I am alone to-night I will go on with our castle-building and finish the picture of the honeymoon we began.'

'There was something more, some other reason you have not told me for your marriage,' he exclaimed. 'I have a right to know.'

'No,' she said, 'I cannot. No words can explain. If you knew my heart better you might understand. Here in the broad daylight how can I speak what is in my heart? But perhaps——'

'Perhaps by-and-by?'

'I am leaving here in a day or two. I suppose we shall not meet again, not for a year perhaps. Think of me kindly. I am not happy. Think of me as the girl of our fancied home-coming.'

'I must see you again before you go,' he said. 'You will meet me by-and-by—to-night. When the darkness is round us you can say what is in your heart.'

'Do you wish to know?' she asked.

'I *will* know!'

It was he who now showed emotion; her manner gave no betrayal of her agitation.

'My remaining guests, Mr. Severn and the Countess, and I are going to a ball at the Barracks to-night. I will stay at home, perhaps. I cannot promise. Perhaps I will come.'

'I will be here at nine o'clock. Will that time do? You will not fail?' His words had the tone of a command.

'I shall not go to the ball,' she answered, 'but I cannot promise to meet you. I may think it better to stay at home and do my castle-building alone.'

'I will be here,' he said.

They stood facing each other as they parted.

'And I—if I come. Do you want to meet the cold unfaithful girl you have thought me? or——' she faltered, and her colour rose to a deep blush under his gaze. 'Good-bye,' she added gravely. 'Good-bye, dear Michael.'

It was the first time during their interview that she had spoken his Christian name.

Corinna came down to dinner dressed for the ball, and she had never looked more beautiful. Her neck and shoulders lost nothing of their fairness from the enfolding snow of her pure white dress, and they won a lustre from the shadowy darkness of her hair. She made a brilliant picture in black and white, saved from all suggestion of coldness by the glow on her cheek and the radiant light of her eyes. The Countess expressed her admiration with her wonted volubility, and Mr. Severn showed his, less openly but not less conclusively, in the quality of his glances. He was in the unhappy frame of mind of a man who knows himself to be unwisely in love; and this was his last evening at Duhallow. He was convinced of Lady Desmond's indifference to her husband; he was equally convinced of her indifference to himself.

Corinna was more than usually animated during dinner, and kept her friends amused by her talk, until she startled them by suddenly announcing that she did not intend to go to the ball.

'But, good heavens, why?' asked the Countess.

'Why? Because I am capricious and have changed my mind,' she laughed. 'I have not had an evening to myself for a week, and the thought of dancing with soldier boys till one or two in the morning has become irksome to me.'

'If Lady Desmond is not going we may as well all give it up,' said Mr. Severn.

'Oh, indeed, I mean to go,' cried the Countess. 'I have promised the little Colonel to dance with him, and he is a dear. Am I to go alone?'

'Indeed you are not. Mr. Severn will take care of you,' said her hostess.

'But you must come, Corinna, really. What excuse am I to make for you?'

'None at all, or, if you like, give the Colonel my love and say I am the most disappointed woman in the world to-night, but that sheer fatigue after a fortnight's entertaining has sent me to bed.'

They were hardly convinced that she had made up her mind not to go until they had entered the carriage and were driven off without her, the Countess exclaiming about the wilfulness of her charming Corinna to a silent and reflective companion.

Meanwhile the battle between right and wrong was going on within Desmond, but it was now an unequal contest. The temptation had increased a hundredfold since his interview with Corinna in the afternoon, and the show of resistance he made was almost mechanical. The firelight cast shadows on the grim walls of his room in the tower, and a gleam of moonlit sky showed through the narrow uncurtained window. It was nearing the time appointed for the meeting, and he paced the floor with a nervous restlessness quite unwonted with him in

times of emergency. Presently he lighted a lamp, and going to the adjoining chamber which he used as a bedroom, unlocked a cabinet and took from it two little pictures which he looked at for a long time. They were both of Kathleen—one a recent photograph, the other a miniature painted soon after the time when he had saved her life in the hunting field. It was the latter which chiefly attracted him. It had caught that winning expression of innocence and mischief which time had hardly changed ; and there was something else in the face of the child, something in its confident trustfulness, which appealed specially to his chivalry and seemed to ask for his protection. He looked at it reverently and put it away with a feeling of sharp pain, conscious that he was like a man who has fallen on his knees to ask heaven to save him from a temptation which he knows the while will not be resisted. That sweet face, the true unstained nature it bore witness to, almost inspired him to make a fresh desperate effort to be loyal. He might abandon the meeting with Corinna altogether, or he might keep his appointment and tell her the bare truth—tell her that her marriage had put an impassable barrier between them, and that he was engaged to be married to Kathleen O'Brien. The former, the only path which promised safety—for as a wise man and a brave soldier once said, 'when there is a woman to be encountered the only course is to run away'—he rejected ; and the latter he accepted as a final compromise with his feverish desire to meet her. He had lost his battle : he was conquered before he went out.

It was a night when the moon, shining through cloudless skies, filled the land with golden light that trembled into silver when it touched the broken

waters of the stream. Thick dew was on the ground, a sweet smell of the earth in the air, and so still was the hour that even the reeds and the flags on the river bank were unstirred. Here in the cloisters of the stream, where the alder-trees hung over the murmuring water and the moonlight was interwoven with the shadows on the path—a trysting-place for happy lovers—here came those unhappy ones for whom the beauty of the scene could be no bond, its solitude no benediction. The whole future of their lives depended upon that hour; but greater issues than their own welfare hung upon their honour, and the destiny of a great cause was in their unconscious keeping.

Up to the very moment of their meeting Desmond deceived himself and refused to acknowledge that his will was in subjection to the temptation which was like fire in his blood. It was otherwise with Corinna. To win back Desmond's love, to give herself utterly to him, was the one passionate desire of her life; and her fear was, not that she might be weak in the time of temptation, but that he might be strong. She had felt some apprehension that he might possibly fail to keep his appointment, and her heart beat violently when she saw him coming towards her; but she neither quickened her footsteps nor gave any indication of her emotion when they met. Bareheaded, in her evening attire, with a cloak about her shoulders, white like a bride, the lady who came down the river path was beautiful as the princess in a fairy tale, with all the magic of the moonlight about her.

‘So you have come,’ he said abruptly.

‘You wished it,’ she replied.

‘But what am I to you?’

'I hardly know,' she answered, with a little laugh. 'A neighbour, an old friend, a judge, an advocate, anything, everything, whatever you choose it to be yourself.'

They had turned and were walking in the direction of the Castle. In the distance the old tower stood out in the moonlight.

'We left our story unfinished this afternoon,' she continued. 'Would you have liked it to be a true story?'

'Perhaps, if the lady had been true.'

'The story of what ought to have been is sometimes truer to our lives than the things that really happen,' Corinna said. 'The lady in the story was true. Where did we leave it? They were married in secret a year ago, and had been parted ever since until—until to-night.'

Her hand touched his as they walked side by side. He clasped it for a moment and then roughly rejected it. 'Don't mind the story. I want no make-believe,' he said. 'What am I to you now?'

'What only one man can ever be to a woman,' she said, in a low tone.

He took her hand again, not roughly now, and felt it tremble in his.

In silence they walked on, his eyes seeking hers, her head averted. At a turn of the path the song of the river grew suddenly more distinct.

'Listen,' she said. 'It is the same sound. I have never ceased to hear it. It was my bridal song.'

'You have not forgotten?' he whispered.

'I remember nothing else.'

He drew her a little closer, and her bare arm slipped from beneath her cloak and rested on his.

'Look at me,' he said.

She turned her beautiful pale face to his, and the next moment she was in his arms, her heart wild with joy, her eyes blinded with tears.

'Oh, Michael,' she cried. 'I am yours, yours, yours only. I was mad when I left you, but I have never been untrue. I have loved you only. Oh, my dearest, I am yours. Take me, Michael, I am your wife.'

He held her to his heart and kissed her.

'You love me still,' she whispered.

'Love!' he echoed, 'what is it? A boy's dream. Don't ask me for love.' He drew her to him again and there was a roughness almost cruel in the movement; but she was content.

'Now,' she said, disengaging herself, 'let me leave you. We had better part now.'

'Can we?' he asked.

They walked onward, they were close to the Castle. The tower stood up in moonlight out of black shadows.

'The story was unfinished,' she answered, after a pause, 'but—but, Michael, let me go——'

He held her hand and led her on.

'My feet are wet with dew,' she said. 'My shoes and stockings are too thin.'

'Are they?' he laughed recklessly; 'then we must dry them. I have a fire in my room.'

'Where are you taking me, Michael? I am afraid,' she whispered.

They were in the shadow of the Castle tower; Desmond took a key from his pocket and unlocked the door.

'Come,' he said, and Corinna followed him into the darkness. Then he drew a bolt across the door and led her up the winding stairway of the tower.

CHAPTER XXII

DISHONOUR

THE prospects of the Nationalist party had never looked so hopeful as they did that autumn. The days of the Conservative administration were numbered, the bye-elections had told of the change in English public opinion, and in the House of Commons, at the head of his solid phalanx drilled to move as one man, Desmond controlled the situation. His alliance with the Opposition was an understood thing, and it was also understood that the price to be paid for it when the Liberal party came into office was self-government for Ireland.

One afternoon during the autumn session, two of Desmond's most ardent supporters, Mr. William Burke and Mr. Quinlan, were seated in the smoking-room of the House of Commons discussing the position when another of the party, Mr. Keefe, approached them, and curtly asked them if they had seen the evening news. He placed a paper on the table beside them and merely adding, 'You'll find good reading in the second page,' passed on.

The others left the paper unopened and went on talking. 'Good reading!' was Mr. Burke's comment. 'That means bad, or Keefe wouldn't have troubled to call our attention to it; or else 'tis some

lie about Desmond. I believe he's as jealous as the devil of him.'

'There's more than one of them like him,' replied his companion. 'They've felt the whip—and no man can make it sting more than Desmond when he chooses. But, take them all through, how he handles them! They'd follow him to hell.'

'While he was winning battles on the way,' Mr. Burke laughed. 'But how if things went against him? Wouldn't it sort us out a bit?'

'Who knows?' replied the other. 'But nothing can go against him, and the easiest part of the road lies before us now. Our fight is won.'

'The man who rules the Liberal party is won.'

'And all his motley crew. By Gad 'tis amazing! Even the Nonconformist smugs shouting for the liberties of the Catholics they hate.'

'They hate the Tories more,' said Mr. Burke. 'But hush! They're our bed-fellows at present, my dear man.'

'And we'll be going to bed with them with spurs on, like Dr. Growling, when our time comes,' said Mr. Quinlan.

His friend laughed. 'We shall put the Liberals into power,' he said; 'but they'll have to dance to our tune. They don't care really a bit more for our cause than we care for theirs, but Desmond has played the game confoundedly well. He has been down again at Wilton Towers with the great man. There are some points in the Bill he is rather tough about, I believe.'

'The Constabulary?'

'Yes, and the number of Irish members in the Imperial Parliament, and the judges; but I think we shall get pretty well all we want to begin with. I

had five minutes' talk with Desmond this afternoon. He seemed very confident. Did you ever meet Lady Desmond, the old man's niece ?'

'No, my boy. We move in different circles, as they say ; but I've seen her and heard enough of her.'

'More than enough ?'

'Well, I heard some gossip in which our leader's name occurred, but of course his enemies never lose a chance.'

Their conversation was interrupted by the entrance of another member of the party, who appeared to be in a great state of excitement. He rushed over to them and asked them if they had heard the news.

'Indeed we have not,' said Mr. Quinlan ; 'but I'll go bail 'tis in that paper lying there, and something unpleasant too, or Keefe wouldn't have brought it over.'

'Well, it is damned unpleasant,' said the newcomer. 'Sir Henry Desmond has filed a petition for divorce against his wife, and Michael Desmond is the co-respondent.'

Mr. Quinlan sprang from his seat with an oath. Mr. Burke dropped his pipe, and then quickly picked it up.

'Are you sure ?' he asked.

'Certain ! 'Tis already in the paper.'

'Another invention of the enemy.'

'Let's hope so. There's no question about the petition, or about Desmond being the co-respondent. There's no other name, but I daresay 'tis a trumped up thing and he'll clear himself all right.'

'But what object can Sir Henry have in discrediting him ?' Mr. Burke mused. 'He's on our side.'

The men were silent.

'There's nothing in it,' Mr. Burke resumed. 'I saw Desmond this afternoon. He never looked serener. 'Tis an infernal invention. Is there a crime he has not been accused of at one time or another? 'Tis a conspiracy. They've been hiring private detectives to give false information, and they've made a fool of Sir Henry. 'Tis done to blacken Desmond before the public at a critical time.'

'That's my own view,' said Mr. Quinlan, and they were again silent.

Other people were talking with animation in the room on the same topic. Mr. Keefe strolled back to his colleagues.

'Well, what do you think of the news?' he asked.

'What do you think of it?' rejoined Mr. Burke.

'I think 'tis serious. He may clear himself; I expect he will. But suppose he should not be able to. Have you thought of that?'

'No, and I wouldn't disgrace me mind by thinking of it,' said Mr. Quinlan.

'Well, I have,' said Keefe; 'and I've heard the views of some of our English friends. If it goes against him it means that the Liberal party will have to repudiate him, the Nonconformists wouldn't stand it; and then good-night to Home Rule for a generation, unless, of course, we choose another leader. That's the position if he cannot clear himself; but no doubt he will.'

Mr. Burke rose angrily. 'Let's get out of this,' he exclaimed. 'I want some fresh air. Come along, Quinlan, we'll go round to Desmond's rooms. And we may as well tell him that some of them are already

beginning to talk about his successor,' he added contemptuously.

There were others among Desmond's friends who had talked of speaking to him on the subject which monopolised attention among politicians that afternoon, but not one of them did so. When they met him they thought better of it: there was something in his dignified, self-contained bearing which seemed to forebode personal allusion to the region of impertinence. He spoke in debate that night, and on rising was greeted with a warmer cheer than usual by his own party, and was listened to with curious attention by all.

He left the House at half-past ten and drove to Upper Brooke Street, where he dismissed his cab and walked for a short distance to the residence of the Comtesse de Prayon. He was taken to the drawing-room, which was brightly lighted but empty, and a moment afterwards the Countess appeared.

'Ah, my dear Mr. Desmond,' she said effusively, 'you are here! We have been expecting you this half-hour. My darling Corinna will be with you at once. So this wicked scandal is abroad. The jealous husband is seeking base revenge for her coldness to him, but my Corinna has nothing to fear. I am her friend, her confidante, Mr. Desmond—one you may trust with all secrets.'

Desmond bowed. 'Happily, my dear Countess, we have no secrets.'

'No secrets!' she exclaimed. 'If I were a man and that were so, and Corinna the lady, I should say "unhappily" not "happily." But you are discreet, though an Irishman.' She shrugged her shoulders and gave him a comical smile.

'I am very grateful to you, madame, for giving

me the opportunity of meeting Lady Desmond at your house,' he said. 'I know you will pardon me for seeming impatient, but my time is the shortest.'

'Of course,' she agreed, going to the door. 'And remember, Mr. Desmond, that my house is at your service at all times and all hours. You may rely on my friendship and discretion.'

She left the room, and a few minutes later Corinna entered. She was very pale, and there was anxiety in her first questioning look at Desmond as she closed the door. Then she ran to him and flung her arms round his neck. He returned her embrace less warmly than she desired, and the anxious look returned to her face as she drew away from him.

'You are troubled about the—the exposure,' she said, 'and you have come to decide what we are to do. You will find me cool-headed, Michael.'

'There is not much time,' he said. 'I cannot venture to stay here long. They are watching me. I should not wonder if one of their detectives were walking up and down outside at this moment. It may be impossible for me to see you again before the case comes on, and I want to get everything clear between us as to our defence.'

She winced at the word 'defence,' and a deeper trouble came into her eyes, but her emotion did not cloud her wits.

'Oh, don't be so business-like,' she said, taking his hand. 'I have not seen you for a fortnight, and I must have my lover to myself before I can bring my mind to think of anything else. I can face anything with you here to help me.' She laid her hands on his shoulders and looked at him with the smile which had so often fascinated him. It was passion, not love, which had drawn him to her, but though

its fires had burned low and her power over him had gone, an afterglow remained, and her incomparable beauty still made its appeal to him. His kisses brought the colour to her cheeks, and with a brighter light in her eyes she led him to a sofa and sat at his side, still holding his hand.

'No,' she said, 'on second thoughts I would rather get the business over first and keep my love till afterwards. I will imagine for a moment that I am in a lawyer's office. I am all attention.'

Her attempt to veil the naked ugliness of the impending theme with grace of manner met no response from Desmond. He came direct to his subject.

'I do not believe they can succeed,' he said. 'The evidence is untrustworthy and incomplete. A witness like Costello is worth nothing—a man who barely escaped hanging—and what a piece of irony that it was I who saved his contemptible life!'

'You nearly killed him, though, since.'

Desmond smiled with grim satisfaction at the memory of the thrashing he had given him one night when he found that he had been watching his movements when Corinna was with him.

'It was not very discreet of me,' he said, 'but it will account for his readiness to appear against me. They won't believe him. Then this man, Severn, who seems to me to have been at the bottom of the whole thing! He appears to have been on the watch too, and to have taken the story to Sir Henry Desmond.'

'Yes,' Corinna answered, with contempt. 'A chivalrous gentleman, indeed, who would endeavour to bring punishment on a woman for following a path in which he would gladly have led her himself.'

'Jealousy, of course,' said Desmond ; ' but beyond saying that we were alone together what can he prove ? There are good reasons to give for our private interviews ; it has been hardly a secret that you were an intermediary in political negotiations.'

Corinna laughed in spite of a growing feeling of misery in her heart. 'Politics !' she exclaimed. 'Oh yes.'

'And as to the other evidence,' Desmond continued, 'I hardly know. Some hotel servants at Chester, perhaps ; but I don't believe we have much to fear—unless—there is one thing I particularly want to know, Corinna. Did you make any sort of admission to your—to Sir Henry Desmond ?'

'No,' she replied, with some agitation. 'No admission ; but he may perhaps have made some inferences from my manner or some thoughtless words.'

'Can you remember what you said ?' he asked anxiously ; 'it is important.'

She was very pale again. 'Some information had been given to him, Michael. I think he wished to find it was false. When he came home from Scotland he—I suppose my appearance pleased him, he was never indifferent—he would have been glad of my indignant denial.'

'You did not give it ?'

She flushed crimson. 'Michael, would you have had me go back to him as his wife ? Could you—could you bear to think of it ? I admitted nothing, but I denied nothing. I made him leave me, and next day I left his house.'

'I don't think that should be construed adversely,' he said reflectively. 'A proud woman unjustly accused might naturally do that.'

‘A proud woman justly accused, a woman who has given herself to a man she loves, could she do otherwise? Michael, you torture me by your coldness!’

He began to perceive a danger in her reckless disregard of consequences. ‘Don’t think me blind to the difficulty of your position, or ungrateful for your loyalty to me,’ he said, ‘but the present is a time for cool judgment. We have to make sure of our defence.’

She echoed the word. ‘Do you really mean to defend the case?’ she said excitedly.

He looked at her in amazement.

‘Can you, would you defend it, Michael? I am yours, yours whatever happens. But then—I mean, if it were not proved, you could not claim me. And what would be my fate? Would you have me still bound to the man who is called my husband? When you—you are my husband? Oh, Michael, my darling, let us face it! Let us leave it unanswered! What is the gossip of a day when we have all the future before us? Let us brave the world together!’ She clasped his hands passionately and tears sprung to her eyes; but though he was not unmoved by her emotion, love only could have given the answer she longed for, and love was not in his heart.

‘Corinna,’ he said, drawing her closer to him, ‘we must face this trouble bravely. It is not merely the question of the world’s comment—that is nothing to us—but there are other far graver issues. If the case is proved against me, it means not only my own political ruin, but the ruin of the Nationalist cause.’

He rose and began pacing up and down the room.

'Oh, how they've waited for a chance like this,' he went on; 'this is the weapon my enemies have prayed for, but we will make it useless to them. Corinna, you must not think me cold. It is as a comrade needing your help, rather than as a lover, that I am compelled to discuss this with you.'

She had conquered her emotion and gave him her attention.

'This is the position,' he continued. 'We are on the eve of securing self-government. I have won your uncle to our side, and he has compelled his party to come with him; but if the case goes against me the alliance will be at an end; his own party will insist on his abandoning me. And more than this, in my own country the priests would condemn me and counsel the people to distrust me. Our party would be disorganised and divided, and our cause would be ruined. I could perhaps face ruin for myself, but not the destruction of my life's work for my country.'

'Your country is your love, not I,' she said; 'but I see the position is more serious than I understood. Tell me what you want me to do.'

He gave a brief outline of the scheme of defence he proposed and the attitude he wished her to take in her interview with her lawyers, and arranged a plan to enable them to communicate with each other again with the least risk of their meeting being discovered. She showed herself cool and clear-headed, and it was not until this cheerless business had been discussed and he was preparing to leave her that her feelings again overpowered her.

'And if these defences are made secure, if the case should not go against us,' she said piteously, 'what will be my position? Oh, Michael, have you thought of our future relationship?'

‘We must let all this blow over before we consider the future,’ he said evasively.

‘But, Michael, am I to be banished from you?’

‘We shall find opportunities of meeting,’ he answered, with a dishonesty of which he was ashamed while he spoke the words, for he had made up his mind that there must be no renewal of their past relationship.

‘Oh,’ she cried, and there was an ominous flash in her eyes, ‘as your neighbour, or perhaps your mistress, with no hope of being your companion, your wife. Michael, oh, Michael, give me some comfort!’ She had risen and was standing at his side, and he laid his hand gently on her shoulder.

‘My poor girl,’ he said, ‘I share your trouble. We have a hard fight before us. We must help each other now. You must trust me to do what is best.’

The full difficulty of his position confronted him, and he saw an unexpected danger in Corinna’s attitude, in her evident desire that the case should be undefended and that she should be free from her marriage bonds. It was even possible that if he made a false step in his treatment of their relationship she might bring disaster upon them by confession, and the one—the only way he saw of appealing to her and steeling her to save him by defending her innocence was by continuing to play the part of lover. Thus one false step, one act of dishonour leads to others; and the man who would willingly retreat from the desperate path finds himself enmeshed in unforeseen toils.

He played the lover’s part against his will, to gain an object, not to win back love, for in the future he looked forward to Corinna had no part. If any

woman had a place in it, it was still Kathleen O'Brien, and of her he dared not think at present. But though the part was insincere, it was not a difficult one to play with that beautiful woman who was at his side ; and once embarked on it, seductive memories quickened his ardour, and the charm of her presence again took possession of him. It was all that was needed to gain him the mastery over her will, and while he held her close and comforted her with loving words she forgot her own trouble in the desire to serve him and obey his wishes. Sinful her love might be, but it was real and passionately great.

‘ If they cannot prove anything, and you silence your enemies and your career is uninjured,’ she said, as he was about to leave her, ‘ then I must be content even if we are parted ; but if—if it should go against you, oh, Michael, do not think hardly of me as the woman who has brought this on you. If all the world were against you I would stand by you in your fight against the world. I have given you the utmost love a girl can give a man. Whatever happens, whether you claim me or whether I am driven from you, I am yours, yours only.’

CHAPTER XXIII

DESMOND *v.* DESMOND

THE Desmond divorce suit was awaited with a public interest which no case in modern times had equalled; and this not so much because of the distinction of the persons concerned—the fame of the Irish leader, and the celebrity of Lady Desmond, a brilliant figure in society, a beauty, the niece of the late Prime Minister—as on account of the grave political issues which were involved. By the Conservatives, who had been decrying Desmond as the greatest enemy of the Empire, an adverse result which would discredit him in the eyes of the public was fervently hoped for; to the Liberals who were in alliance with him, and saw that his failure to clear himself would mean political confusion, perhaps disaster, his success was of vital importance; and in the ranks of his own party there was consternation. Among these were a few who for personal reasons might hope that he would fail, but the majority saw that whatever blow fell on their leader fell on their country, and not only did they desire no other leader, but they knew that they could not find one.

Desmond himself seemed at the time to be the only man among them who treated the situation with

unconcern, and his demeanour did much to restore confidence among his followers and convince them that this suit was but one more attempt on the part of his enemies to ruin him.

At this period of difficulty and uncertainty the danger which threatened Desmond's career troubled him less than his own self-contempt on account of the part he found himself obliged to play. He could meet difficulty and face danger; his spirit rose to the occasion of a fight, however desperate; and in fighting he was not scrupulous; but he was no hypocrite, and the necessity of defending his innocence to Kathleen O'Brien while he still posed as a lover to Corinna was abhorrent to him. Corinna he no longer loved, and the overmastering passion which had led him from his allegiance to Kathleen had ceased to dominate him. The sentimental affection which Kathleen had awakened in him remained unchanged; his unfaithfulness to her stung him with remorse. His imagination harrowed him with a picture of the loyal, brave-hearted girl's feelings on hearing the tidings of the divorce case, and he hesitated as to the course to adopt in speaking about it to her. There was one and only one honest way possible, and that was to see her, confess everything to her, and either win her forgiveness or accept her rejection like a man. And he would have done well to trust to her generosity, but this course needed a moral courage which his recent capitulation had undermined. Furthermore, he saw that this straightforward course would involve his abandoning the pretence of the lover's part with Corinna; and to do this might mean her refusal to defend the case, and the wreck of his political career.

Previously, when the right and the wrong had been

so luminously presented to him, he had made the fatal choice, though he knew there was a power in him to resist it; now his will to choose was enfeebled, and from the first evil step he was driven into a path on which hypocrisy and deception were his weapons of war.

He wrote at once both to his father and Kathleen on the subject which he knew would be speedily brought to their notice from other directions. He addressed his letter to his father—not, as was his custom, to his mother; for to her, when he faced the task, he found a peculiar difficulty in lying. He referred in his letter to the divorce proceedings as the latest and most abominable attempt on the part of his political enemies to discredit him; and while he admitted that his private interviews with Lady Desmond, who had acted as an intermediary in negotiations between him and the Liberal party, might offer a pretext for calumnious inference, he maintained there was no real cause for apprehension, and expressed his confidence that the case would result in the humiliation of his accusers. ‘It is curious,’ he added, ‘that this attack should come from the descendant of the man whose memory as the family traitor we cherish with loathing.’

In his letter to Kathleen he also spoke of the divorce proceedings as an attempt—the last, vilest, and most desperate attempt—on the part of his enemies to injure him, and bade her be of good courage and rest assured that he would triumphantly prove his innocence. He also alluded to the private political negotiations, and admitted with false candour that there had been a time, before her marriage, when he had been under the influence of her personal charms.

‘My greatest trouble at this harassing time,’ he went on—and this he wrote honestly—‘is on your account. It pains me more than I can say that you should have the distress of hearing my name scandalously assailed by people always ready to believe the worst of me, while it is not in your power to defend me. You have always heard evil spoken of me, and yet you have believed in me. My character has been blackened to you a hundred times, and yet you have trusted in my honour; and now at a time when my enemies are a pack of wolves yelping at my heels, and even my friends are dismayed, the one comfort I have, the only thing that gives me rest, is the certainty of your faith in me, the knowledge that, however plausible the accusations made against me, there is one loyal, sweet-hearted Irish girl who trusts me implicitly. Do not be troubled, dearest, and have no fear as to the result of the case. But for the pressure of my work, which now occupies every moment of my time, I would have come over to see you, to tell you more happily than I can write it of the love that grows deeper for you every day, and to win from your lips the dear answer of your confidence which my heart already understands.’

‘MY DEAREST MICHAEL,’ Kathleen replied—‘If I have hesitated to desert my own people and their party and stand at your side, I do so no longer. This last and most cruel attempt to injure you will do you no harm, but I cannot forgive those who are eager to believe what is said against you, and who talk of you as if it were true. Don’t be distressed on my account, my only trouble is on yours, and in thinking of all the worry this publicity must give you when you are hard pressed and overworked already. Please do not let us discuss the subject at all. And yet there is one thing I would say and am almost afraid to say. Dear Michael, remember that I will marry you when you like. And might it perhaps be a good thing if our engagement were kept a secret no longer? Perhaps you might feel glad at a time when these lies are abroad that the world might see that I was proud to prove my contempt for them.’

The effect of the letter on Desmond was to kindle his love for the girl who wrote it to enthusiasm, and at the same time it gave him more pain than he had ever before had to endure. He loathed the vileness of responding to her perfect trust with fresh dissimulation, but he saw no other course. To confess the truth to her, to break with Corinna, to abandon his defence of the divorce suit, meant political disaster and probably also the loss of Kathleen. He had not the moral courage for this; but it needed courage also of another sort, a desperate determination, to adhere to the course he had chosen—to defend before the world, before his accusers, before the girl who loved him, the honour which did not exist; to bear himself proudly before his friends and his enemies, and to go into the fight with a good heart, when he knew that defeat meant ruin. But this courage he had.

Kathleen's generous proposal to publish their engagement at once was obviously undesirable, as it would undoubtedly arouse Corinna's anger and lead to her confession of the truth. He wrote with glowing gratitude to Kathleen, but told her that he could not accept her suggestion, for he was determined to clear his own name of suspicion before he allowed hers to be associated with it. To no one else except his lawyer did he even allude to the impending case, and while it was the subject of burning interest in political circles, it was not mentioned in his presence even by his most intimate associates.

Nightly in the House of Commons, with unabated energy and unrivalled skill, he continued to direct the tactics of obstruction which were harassing every movement of a weakened Government; his demeanour was unruffled by any semblance of

anxiety ; and, as one of his opponents remarked, he gave Sir Henry Desmond a look the next time he passed him in the lobby, which was what you might have expected if that gentleman had been the co-respondent and he the petitioner. Desmond was a born fighter, a superb fighter, and the greatest battle of his life had begun.

The case came before the Court in November. A divorce suit in which people in high places are concerned is always eagerly followed. Glimpses of private life, significant in illustration of character—and nowhere else obtainable—are provided for the public by the Court. Moreover, an infringement of the seventh commandment has a fascination alike for the frivolous and the respectable, and seems to afford a sort of vicarious satisfaction even to those least likely to fall into temptation themselves. A noted beauty who was niece of a great statesman, and a rising politician of good social standing, would in themselves have been attractive enough actors to give celebrity to the case in which they played a part ; but it was the fame of Desmond and the political issues which hung upon the result of the suit that drew the eager attention not only of England and Ireland, but of half the world, to that Court of Justice.

We need not follow the proceedings very closely : their sequel alone affects those whose fortunes we are following. The case was outlined by the Counsel for Sir Henry Desmond, who undertook to bring conclusive evidence to prove that the co-respondent and Lady Desmond had been constantly alone together in circumstances which admitted of only one construction.

Sir Henry himself was the first witness. Comporting himself with a bearing in which the dignity

befitting an English statesman was mingled with the severity proper to an outraged husband, and the pain natural to a chivalrous gentleman on being compelled to accuse a lady, he made a long statement in which he referred to the terms of amity which had for a time existed between his wife and himself, the gradually growing coldness on her part, and finally, after his return from Scotland and hers from Ireland, the culmination of the coldness in her refusal to resume marital relations. He stated that at this time she made certain remarks which first aroused his suspicions, and that when a few days later, after receiving some information as to her intimacy with the co-respondent which seemed to require explanation, he had spoken to her on the subject, she had given him unsatisfactory answers. Cross-examined on this point, he would not swear that what she said was a direct confession of her guilt, but maintained that it was equivalent to a tacit admission. 'Therefore,' observed Counsel sarcastically, 'we are to assume that when a lady proudly disdains to reply to a false accusation it is to be regarded as an admission of guilt.'

Following Sir Henry Desmond, Mr. Severn, his secretary, Costello, servants at a Holyhead hotel, a private detective, and the Comtesse de Prayon—an unexpected appearance—were called as witnesses.

The evidence of Costello was discredited by the defence on the grounds of his notorious bad character, though here Desmond's own words on behalf of that ruffian in the murder trial were quoted as a reply; while again, on the other side, the thrashing which Desmond had given the fellow when he found him playing spy was adduced as a motive for his seeking revenge in bearing false witness against him.

Costello's evidence and his ridiculous attitude and cunning under cross-examination made the humorous episode in the trial. Mr. Severn, who had also played the spy, was a contemptible figure under examination. 'The zeal of his master's house has indeed eaten up the man who played detective on his hostess in the intervals of collecting political statistics,' remarked Counsel; but no motive of self-interest or enmity could be shown to weaken the value of his statements. The evidence of hotel servants at Holyhead was brought to prove that Lady Desmond and Michael, who had admittedly travelled to England together, had occupied adjoining bedrooms with a connecting door; but it was allowed that these rooms were often let separately, and that the door could be secured by a lock on both sides. The Countess was avowedly on the side of the defence, but her equivocations, her protestations, and her admissions did as much to damage the cause she ostentatiously supported as if she deliberately aimed at producing that effect.

Lady Desmond's evidence was looked forward to with intense interest, but when the time came for her to appear she had not arrived, and Desmond was called before her. His evidence was faultless in its clear simplicity. Himself the most brilliant lawyer of his time at the Irish Bar, he knew what to say, what to leave unsaid; and cross-examination served only to give him an opportunity to strengthen his position. He produced but one witness, and he was no less a personage than the ex-Premier. The object of calling him was to prove the contention that Lady Desmond had been a medium of political negotiation between the Liberal party and the Irish chief, and that this fact was in itself an ample reason for the

secret interviews which had taken place between them. He stated that it was quite true that Lady Desmond had been the first to bring him and Mr. Desmond together, and on one or two occasions afterwards had assisted the communications. He had nothing more to say, and refused to give any expression of opinion as to the necessity of frequent interviews. On the whole, the evidence against Desmond seemed inconclusive, and provided Lady Desmond could face the ordeal of cross-examination successfully, a judgment in his favour was not improbable. Here, however, fell the blow. Her non-appearance in Court at the proper time caused some anxiety to the lawyers, to be followed shortly afterwards by consternation when they received a letter from her to say that she had decided not to submit to the humiliation of public insult, and would have no part in the proceedings. An attempt to see her at the house of the Comtesse de Prayon, where she had been staying, was futile, as she had left and her address was unknown.

Whether in the eyes of the law her absence, her failure to deny the charge against her, turned the scale of justice in condemnation, or whether the Court concerned itself with the evidence only, it is for lawyers to pronounce an opinion ; but in the eyes of the world this was held to be the determining factor in the case. The Court gave judgment that Lady Desmond was guilty of adultery with the co-respondent, Michael Desmond, and granted a decree *nisi*.

The news of the result of the trial created intense excitement in both islands ; but while in Ireland the amazement, incredulity, and dismay found for the moment no expression, in England there arose an

immediate tumult of vociferation. The newspapers, condemned to silence during the trial, were like hounds in full cry at sight of their quarry. The note of hatred and triumph was dominant, and even in that section of the English press which belonged to the party in alliance with Desmond the alarm was almost universal. The Tory organs invited the world to behold what manner of man their opponents had entered into partnership with for the dismemberment of the Empire. The papers under Non-conformist influence demanded of the Irish party that they should instantly choose another leader ; and even the moderate exponents of Liberal opinion, while maintaining that the political situation remained unchanged, gravely counselled the necessity on Desmond's part of at least a temporary retirement from public life. In the Nationalist ranks there was consternation ; but while the severity of the blow which had fallen was felt, and the danger to their cause, if Desmond remained in command, fully recognised, the first impulse on the part of the majority of his followers was to stand by their leader.

He treated the whole affair himself with an apparent indifference and contempt which amazed even those who were most familiar with his coolness. To his most intimate friends he made no explanation, no protest against the decision of the Court, and allowed them no opportunity of discussing the subject. As to his leadership of the party, he took it for granted that this remained indisputable. The day after the conclusion of the trial he had notices sent out to the Irish members convening a meeting for the following week, to discuss recent negotiations with the Liberal leaders on certain clauses in the Home Rule Bill, and the same evening he started for Ireland, having

previously telegraphed to Kathleen O'Brien that he was coming. As his train was leaving, a letter was brought to him. He recognised the writing with a look of displeasure, and having read the note, tore it up and threw the fragments out of the carriage window. 'Could you come and see me here to-night or to-morrow morning if only for five minutes,' were Corinna's words, written from the house of the Comtesse de Prayon.

In the three days of Michael's absence in Ireland much happened in the political world. The outcry against him grew louder. Conferences were held between the Liberal leaders and certain of the Irish members, in which the former urged that public opinion made it imperative that the Nationalist party should elect a new chairman. Desmond received their communication on his return to London with a burst of anger and a flat refusal. His decision was followed by the publication of a letter from the ex-Premier, in which he stated that his party no longer recognised Desmond as the Irish leader, and insisted on his being replaced before negotiations could be continued. The Nationalist ranks were thrown into confusion. Those who, jealous of his supreme influence and power, had been secret enemies in his camp, now boldly declared themselves; and, covering their disloyalty under a show of patriotism, vehemently demanded his removal from his present office. They were few in number. Of the rest, one section, influenced by motives of prudence, and believing that the only hope of triumph for the Nationalist cause lay in the Liberal alliance, counselled his temporary retirement; the other, true to the man who had fought their battles and created their strength, determined to stand by their leader at all costs.

It thus happened that the meeting which Desmond had called for dealing with the Bill became a discussion of his own position, and instead of finding himself leading, as heretofore, a united party to battle, he was standing in a divided camp, confronted with the outburst of an internal struggle, destined to be more cruel and desperate than any he had taken part in against the common enemy.

It is a fault of our national character that we are precipitate in judgment, quick in resentment, intemperate in antagonisms ; and in nothing had Desmond's genius been more clearly demonstrated than in the power he had shown in silencing differences, humouring prejudices, and controlling into a compact and unanimous force the party he led. The discordant elements long held together by the magnetism of his rule had at last flown asunder, and these he strove with all his skill to reunite. At that first memorable meeting with his colleagues he came near to success. A resolution, proposed by Mr. Keefe, that his chairmanship of the party had terminated, was not carried. He himself offered to resign provided the Liberal party would give definite assurance on the disputed clauses in the Home Rule Bill, and a deputation was appointed to communicate with the Liberal leader on the proposition. He refused to discuss the subject until Desmond had been superseded, and the fight was renewed.

At each meeting of the Nationalists the debates grew stormier, the antagonism between the sections of the party more marked ; and now that Desmond was no longer acting as an arbiter, a healer of differences, but was himself fighting on one side, all hope of peace disappeared. He may have acted unwisely in his own interest and the interest of his

cause in not resigning, if only temporarily ; but his blood was up ; his wrath was kindled against men, placed by himself in their present position, who now opposed him ; the attacks of those members, enemies in secret who had now declared themselves openly, stung him to fury ; and he repudiated the dictation of the Liberal party with passionate resentment. His final words, addressed to the meeting in which the division of the party became complete, were long remembered both by his friends and his enemies.

‘In deserting me,’ he said, ‘you are abandoning your cause. In bowing to English commands, in permitting an English party to appoint your leader, you are humiliating Ireland. England has never given Ireland anything except when compelled to do so—except at the point of the sword. In repudiating me you are throwing away your sword. With your ranks broken, your counsels divided, I see you as sheep on the mountains which have no shepherd. With those who now stand by me and who will follow me, I shall re-create a national fighting force ; we will reorganise our power. You have abandoned me, but Ireland has not. You are to-day the supposed representatives of Ireland—to-morrow you will be so no longer. You will represent the English Liberal party, not Ireland ; the English Nonconformist press, not our national liberties. When I look round me and see among you those whose fear of the threats or trust in the promises of England are greater than their confidence in the leader who compelled England to make terms with him ; when I see among these the faces of the friends I have trusted, of the men I have selected to serve their country, I am filled with sorrow. God knows I would be fighting with you, not against you ; but if you compel me to fight

against you, I am fighting with Ireland against you. If I am your leader no longer, I remain the leader of the Irish people.'

He spoke with passionate earnestness, and there was not a man in the room who was unmoved. The magnetism of the great leader who had brought them through difficulty and despair to the threshold of victory thrilled them once more. His enemies were silent, his loyal supporters sprang to their feet and acclaimed their hero ; and the others, that majority of his old followers who believed that they were serving their country best in forsaking him, and who were about to enter on a fierce struggle against him, rose and left the room, despondent of the future and sad at heart.



CHAPTER XXIV

THE BROTHERS

WHILE the poet is always very tender to the rejected lover (who is very frequently no other than himself), the philosopher is inclined to regard him with a smile, foreseeing a day when the hero of the wounded heart will re-enter the lists of love none the worse for his tumble. It is not the blow, not the impact—which might have been tragic—but the reassuring rebound which is comic; and the philosopher has been led by his observations to regard the buffetings of love as hardly more harmful than those of the clown's bladder which we see leaping back from the bald head in a pantomime.

There must, however, be some discrimination between the ninety-nine lovers who are but imperfectly acquainted with the ladies who reject their admiration and the one whose devotion has been the growth of years and is fast bound with comradeship; and in the case of Kathleen O'Brien's suitors our philosopher, ready to smile at the blighted hopes of Horace Croker, might perhaps pause to wonder what consolation Time could bring to Connor Desmond. Connor asked himself this question, believing there was no consolation for him; but he was a young and

vigorous man, sound in body and mind, and there was something healthy even in his sorrow, for in his most disconsolate hours he did not look at life pessimistically. He accepted his loss of Kathleen as a decree against which there was no appeal—her acceptance of his brother made it final—and it spoke well for the generosity of his nature that he could nevertheless think of Michael without bitterness. For the sake of Kathleen, Connor had dared to stand in the sight of his countrymen as a deserter from his cause, and he was not ashamed of what he had done, though probably if his action had been followed by success instead of failure he would have been ashamed. He had lost the respect of his countrymen, lost the confidence of his brother, lost the girl he had fought so hard to win, and for the time life offered him no new hope or strenuous aim ; yet even then he did not rail against fate or indulge in much self-pity. He bore his trouble like a man, and went back to his chambers in Dublin, glad to find work which helped to occupy his mind and keep him from brooding on his own sorrow.

On hearing of the proceedings in the Divorce Court his first feeling was one of anger, produced by an instant conclusion that the accusation against his brother was a villainous conspiracy on the part of his enemies, and a perception that the public scandal would be nothing less than torture to Kathleen. He knew the sensitive refinement of her nature, and pictured her distress at the comments she would be sure to hear from those around her ; but he also understood her brave heart, and he had no fear that her faith in Michael would be shaken by evil report. His impulse was to go to her in case she needed the cheer of a proved friend, but when it came to the

point he found a difficulty in facing an interview, and chose instead to send a letter—one of the friendly, affectionate communications he had so often before written to her—in which quite casually he alluded to this last attempt to discredit Michael, and his sorrow that she should have to suffer the annoyance of hearing him calumniated.

Nevertheless, though it was his honest conviction that Michael was innocent and that he would triumphantly prove it when the case came before the Court, he found his imagination prompting the question : ‘What if by chance this is true?’ And here again his first thought was not of himself, but of Kathleen ; not of the possibility this might give him of yet winning her himself, but of the misery it would entail upon her ; and when, subsequently, that other aspect of the situation also occurred to him, he dismissed the suggestion as a whisper of the devil.

The result of the divorce proceedings, which had amazed and shocked the whole country, roused Connor to action. He still found it almost impossible to believe that his brother was not innocent. How was it possible, he kept asking himself, that a man who loved Kathleen O’Brien, and had only just won her promise to marry him, could be capable of this gross infidelity ? For the sin itself he might have found excuse, but he could find none for the unpardonable disloyalty. He preferred to believe, in spite of the damaging evidence, that justice had miscarried, and that after many a previous futile effort on the part of Michael’s enemies to blacken his character, a diabolical plot had at last succeeded.

The news of the split in the ranks of the Nationalist

party and Michael's desertion by the majority of his followers still further aroused Connor's indignation, and feeling that there had never been a time when his brother stood so much in need of the loyalty of his friends, he went over to London to see him.

The struggle between the two sections of the party had begun in bitter earnest : old bonds that had taken long years to forge had been snapped in a day ; old friendships were changed to hatreds ; the national cause itself was almost forgotten in the strife between its upholders. Michael had been at work night and day, organising his forces and planning his new and desperate campaign. The strain had begun to tell upon him, and Connor was struck by the change in his appearance when they met.

The visit was unexpected by Michael. He returned late in the evening to his chambers and found Connor waiting for him. In a moment the hard look which his face had worn when he entered the room disappeared, and the old winning smile that Connor knew so well took its place.

'Connor !' he cried, grasping his hand ; 'my dear lad ! You, then, have not deserted me.'

'No, I thought you might want me just now,' Connor answered.

'My God, you're right !' said Michael. 'Tis now I know my true friends. I didn't doubt you. If I had known where you were I'd have sent for you. And you have come of your own accord—the one comrade I really need. 'Tis the first ray of sunshine I have seen for some time.' He took off his overcoat and rang the bell. 'When did you come ? Have they shown you your room ? Have you had

anything to eat?' he asked. 'That's right; then we can smoke.'

A servant brought in a decanter of whisky and glasses, and Michael flung himself into a chair and lighted a cigar.

'Well, blood's thicker than water, old fellow,' he said. 'I never doubted you. We differed on a detail of policy, but details are thrown to the winds now. It's a question of friend or foe, and you and I are fighting together again and fighting for Ireland. These fellows who have thrown me over at the command of an English party, men who owed their position to me—your friend Regan's one of them, by the way—these deserters neither know their countrymen nor me. And there are some among them who have hated me, and been eager for my overthrow. If they think they have succeeded, they don't know their countrymen and they don't know me. Half the work of my life is undone, Connor, but I shall not rest till I have completed it.'

'You will,' said Connor warmly. 'I am with you heart and soul, and glad of the chance of fighting at your side. In all the wretched annals of our history there had not been a more shameful thing than this conspiracy to discredit you; and even if the charge against you had been true, they would have deserved to have been put up and shot for deserting you.'

Desmond's heart was smitten with a sudden pang. Not only Kathleen, but Connor also, believed him innocent, in spite of the evidence of the trial. It would have been a relief to him if his brother had taken it for granted that he was guilty; he was burdened by false pretences; he had not lost his self-

respect, but dissimulation was undermining it. He rose from his seat, threw away his cigar, and began pacing up and down.

'Connor,' he said, after a short silence, 'I have no friend I can trust like you. There shall be no barrier of dishonesty between us. You have generously refused to believe the charges against me, in spite of the result of the proceedings. To every one else I have said that the accusation was false. It is true.'

'My God!' cried Connor. 'What about Kathleen?'

'Then you know. She has told you of our engagement?'

'Yes, yes,' Connor answered impatiently. 'And this was going on since your engagement? You did not love her!' The look of contempt in his face stung Michael like a whip. He had been able to face his enemies unflinching; he shrunk from his brother's scorn.

'I have loved her and no other,' Michael replied.

'Loved her! Well, have you broken her heart? What does she feel about it?'

'She doesn't believe it!'

'Have you lied to her about it?'

Desmond bore his brother's questioning humbly. 'Yes,' he replied. 'If I had told her the position it would have broken her heart. She gave me no chance of confession. She took my fidelity to her for granted. No man could have told her the truth. And there are times when a man must conceal the truth from the girl he loves. She could never understand.'

'Well, I am a man, and I don't understand,' said Connor. 'It is incredible. But you will have to tell

her. Even now it is not too late. Trust in her generosity, and she will forgive you. I know her better than you ; but for God's sake don't put this deception between you and her or it will end in sorrow. I wouldn't have cared a damn if you had been in a dozen divorce cases, but I cannot forgive your disloyalty to that girl.'

'And do you think I can forgive myself,' exclaimed Michael. 'I would give ten years of my life to be able to recall the last few months. But if you knew everything you would condemn me less. Listen now ! You are my only friend. I can have no half confidences with you. Perhaps I can tell you enough to make you understand how a man may be unfaithful to a woman without ceasing to love her. It might not have been possible for you. You and I regarded women differently. So much the better for you.'

The desire to lessen Connor's contempt for his conduct had led him to the point of telling him the whole story of his relations with Corinna, but he checked the impulse. He suddenly saw it as a crowning dishonour to seek excuse for himself in condemning an unhappy woman.

'But perhaps you would not understand,' he said, 'and no ! I shall not try to make you understand. I took the wrong path. There is no excuse for me. I was disloyal to the best girl that ever loved a sinful man, and I have to bear the burden of my dishonour. You know the worst of me, Connor, and I would not have it otherwise. Judge me as generously as you can. You are the only man whose opinion matters to me.'

'Don't imagine I am setting myself up as a judge of your morals,' Connor answered ; 'but Kathleen

has been a great friend of mine since we were children, and I am troubled, desperately troubled on her account. I am not going back on you, but I want to put my whole heart into the fight, and I couldn't do it unless you play the game fairly with her. If you tell her the truth and trust to her love and generosity she will forgive you—I am certain of it, though it will hit her hard; but if you let her marry you with this lie between you, it will end badly.'

'How many men tell the innocent girls they are going to marry of certain episodes in their past lives?' asked Michael. 'They could not understand. We have to lie to them. It would break Kathleen's heart to know the truth.'

'It would not,' Connor persisted, 'not if you told her in time. It would break her heart to find out afterwards that you had been deceiving her. And if by chance I am wrong, and if when you told her she refused to marry you, wouldn't you prefer that to playing the hypocrite all your life. Michael, I entreat you to follow my advice in this and make a clean breast of it. You'll have her on your side, and you'll go into your fight with a new spirit.'

Michael had returned to his chair, and was sitting with his head bent forward and a far-off look in his eyes. 'I will, Connor,' he said. 'I am not thinking of the danger of losing her, but of the shock, the pain it will give her. I am not as bad as you think. Yes, it will perhaps be better to face it.'

Connor's heart was pained by the worn and dejected look on his strong brother's face, and though he was sick at heart himself he made an effort to cheer him.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘we will talk no more of it now. There is fighting to be done, and I am here to help you. Tell me how things stand, and what is to be our next move against this alliance of English hypocrites and Irish turncoats.’

‘Connor,’ said Michael, ‘you are the best friend and the best brother a man ever had.’

They talked on political subjects and on Michael’s plans to a late hour, and no further reference was made to Kathleen until they were parting for the night, when Michael reverted to the painful subject himself. ‘All the while we have been talking,’ he said, ‘I have been unable to forget your words about Kathleen. I see you are right, and it is my duty to tell her the truth whatever comes of it. I give you my word I will do so.’

‘And I give you mine to stand by both of you through thick and thin,’ replied Connor warmly.

In the fight which raged between the two sections of the Nationalist party the minority who remained faithful to Desmond were inspired by a fierce enthusiasm, a loyalty to their old leader which gave them a strength and union lacking among those on the other side. These had no true captain, and many of them, patriotic men who believed they were acting in the true interests of their country in sacrificing Desmond for the maintenance of the Liberal alliance, had little heart for a fight against their old chief. The battlefield was transferred from England to Ireland, and here, but for one adverse influence, Desmond would have carried all before him. The Catholic clergy, however, felt themselves bound to withdraw their support from him in consequence of the revelations of the Divorce

Court, and he found himself met by an opposition more powerful than any political organisation in the land. This he had foreseen ; he was prepared for more than a temporary check in his campaign ; but his confidence in himself and in the temper of the people remained unchanged, and he looked forward to ultimate victory.

Connor plunged into the struggle at his side, and showed a capacity for hard work and organisation hardly inferior to his brother's. He travelled through the country establishing political agencies, he spoke himself at public meetings where Michael could not be present, and he undertook the temporary management of a new daily paper in Dublin, established to take the place of one that had gone over to the enemy.

Connor was whole-heartedly on his side. The gallant fight his brother was making rekindled his old hero-worship, contempt for the men who had deserted their leader aroused his fighting spirit, and the knowledge of the burden of remorse which Michael had to bear unknown to the world touched his generous heart. The promise Michael had given him to confess the truth to Kathleen, after having already denied it, and his perception of the magnitude of his ordeal, won Connor's forgiveness and loyal allegiance ; but it was something more than comradeship or hero-worship or contempt for disloyalty that made Connor stand at the side of the man who had won the girl he had hoped to win for himself. It was his love for that girl that still inspired him. He knew that she would need his counsel and help in the dark days that were before her ; that it would be possible for him to help her to bear the burden

by standing by her as a brother ; and that an opportunity was now given him of proving the depth and breadth of his devotion, by hiding from her his own sorrow, and fighting at the side of the man she loved.

CHAPTER XXV

A LOVER'S FRIENDSHIP AND A FRIEND'S LOVE

GENTLE rain had been falling for hours, the far horizon of mountain and moorland visible from Ballyvodra on clear days was hidden in the mist, and the view narrowed to the belts of woodland that skirted the park. The wet day brought its own cheerfulness to the place. Work in the fields was exchanged for work in the farm buildings. A pleasant hum came from the barn, and a haze of winnowed chaff issued from one of its windows. Here men and women were at work together, and merry voices and laughter told of labour that was no burden. In the other buildings also there was activity. Tom Condon the shepherd was engaged with two helpers in repairing and tarring sheep nets, and the shed in which they were working was full of the half-pleasant, half-suffocating fumes that came from a cauldron of pitch that boiled above a wood fire; while in cowhouse and haggard a dozen jobs which had been kept for a rainy day, such as the breaking of a store of oil-cake, the repairing of a farm butt, the cutting up of firewood, were having attention.

The place had its old look, no indication of the hotel. The tourist season was over, and the three

Englishmen who had taken up their quarters at Ballyvodra for the winter's hunting had gone home for Christmas. Mr. Barrington was the only remaining guest, and Mr. O'Brien went his rounds again with something of the feeling of a proprietor. Kathleen had no reason to be displeased with the result of her venture. For a first season the hotel had been fairly successful, and the immediate pressure of money difficulties had been removed by Mr. Barrington's purchase of the mortgages on the estate.

Troubles graver than the old ones occupied her mind this morning as she looked out on the picture of blurred woodland framed by her window. She had just finished writing a letter, and the train of thought that followed was not happy. The letter was to Corinna, and ran thus :—

DEAR LADY DESMOND—I have just learned from a newspaper report of your serious illness, and as I have no doubt as to what has caused it, I feel compelled to write to you. For it may be some comfort to you, some help to you in bearing this cruel wrong, to know that another woman, and she as deeply concerned in the truth as yourself, believes, indeed knows, that you are innocent. Perhaps you have not heard of my engagement to Mr. Desmond, but in any case you will be glad of my assurance that even before he himself told me that the accusation was false, I never had any doubt about it. His enemies have been lying in wait for him throughout his career, and in the triumph of this fiendish plot you have also had to suffer—more, indeed, than any one else. I trust you may be given strength to bear your terrible trouble, and if my friendship and sympathy can be any comfort to you, you may count upon it now and always.—Believe me, dear Lady Desmond, very sincerely yours,
KATHLEEN O'BRIEN.

She had written this letter on an impulse of

generous sympathy to a sister in distress, led from her own suffering to consider the greater distress of another. What was her own trouble, she thought, compared with that of a loyal wife who was shamed before the world and repudiated by her husband on a false charge? It had pained her to write the letter and to speak of her engagement to Michael, but a double motive had guided her.

Deciding to post the letter with her own hand, she put on her hat and a waterproof, and set off through the rain to the little post-office which had been established in one of the cottages at the cross roads since the opening of the hotel. Mrs. Deleuchry, the mother of the young postmistress, caught sight of Kathleen as she was passing, and ran to the door.

'Oh, Miss Kathleen,' she cried, 'is it passing the door ye are, and not coming in to spake a word to us?'

'Of course I was coming in, Mrs. Deleuchry. And how's himself? Ah, there you are, Patsy!' Kathleen exclaimed, as an old man emerged from the darkness and smoke of an inner room.

'Bring a chair for her honour's ladyship, Patsy,' said his wife. 'Indeed, 'tis good to see you, Miss Kathleen, and the rain-drops shining on your pretty pink cheeks. We thought 'twas a thrifle pale you were looking in the summer wid all the throuble of the hot-tel, but now, thank God, you're shamin' the roses in your own gyarden.'

'I am never ill,' Kathleen laughed. 'In a good hour be it spoken,' she quickly added in deference to local superstition. 'Now tell me, is there any news?'

'There is, then,' replied the old man. 'Jem

Costello's back again. I seen him pass this door wid me own eyes.'

Kathleen gave a little shiver.

'And Mary Rahilly's lost her rayson, honest woman,' added Mrs. Deleuchry, 'and they do be spakin' of takin' her to the Infirmary.'

'Poor woman,' said Kathleen. She knew that the Infirmary was the word which a sense of delicacy substituted for the Lunatic Asylum.

'Wandherin' in her poor mind,' her informant continued, 'and sayin' she laid her curse on Michael Desmond, and she couldn't take it off him. The Lord preserve us, and keep us from harm.'

'And 'tis Michael Desmond Costello has to thank that he did not swing for John Rahilly, and what does he do for the man that gave him his life?' The old man hesitated, his good-breeding telling him that the subject of the divorce was not a proper one for him to speak of before a young lady. 'He'll shwing yet,' he added.

'And now for some more cheerful news,' said Kathleen with a sudden effort. 'Is it not true that Pat Dorgan is going to be married to the widow Hennesy?'

''Tis thrue, miss! There was a matter of fifteen pounds between them, but she found the money shure enough. Some say she had it hidden, and more say 'twas lint her by Tom Fehan.'

'But Tom Fehan was the other man who wanted to marry her, or whom she wanted to marry,' laughed Kathleen.

'Begorra, your honour has it,' chuckled the old man. 'That's why he lint her the money, so he'd be safe himself.'

'I forgot me manners, Miss Kathleen, and never

axed afther his honour and the ladies. Oh, wisha, glory be to God,' Mrs. Deleuchry cried in the same breath, while she ran to the door. 'There's Masther Connor gone by, walking at the rate of a hunt. Sure I didn't know he was at home.'

Kathleen flushed with surprise. 'Are you sure?' she asked, going to the door herself for verification. ''Tis indeed; I suppose he's on his way up to the house.'

'Phaix, he'd have saved time by calling at the post-office,' remarked Mrs. Deleuchry, with that respectful familiarity which is nowhere so marked as among the retainers of an Irish family. 'A grand young gintleman, God bless him; and they do be tellin'—old Mr. Desmond said the words himself—that Mr. Barrington's money's his widout the axin' if he'd take sides agin' Mr. Michael. But not he! They're fightin' on the one side, and, plaze God, they'll win and let the dirty money go.'

'Yes, I think he's quite right to do so,' said Kathleen, rising. 'Well, good-bye. I must be going.'

'And good luck, miss, and 'tis proud we are to have kept you so long,' and 'God bless your honour,' said the old couple.

Kathleen had not seen Connor since the evening after the Buttevant meeting, when he had asked her to be his wife, but she had found some relief from the miserable memory of that interview in the letter he had since written to her about Michael. It had breathed such comradeship, such brotherliness, that she felt she could now meet him without constraint, and that he could meet her without pain. She loved him very deeply, more even than she knew; she relied on him as on no one else; and now, in her time of tribu-

lation, she longed to confide in him. And he played his part bravely, and betrayed nothing of the pain it gave him to meet her; indeed, so old was their friendship that they fell at once and quite naturally into their familiar manner with each other. In taking it for granted that their former relationship was to be unchanged, nay, perhaps even made dearer by the impossibility of a closer bond, she struck a true note of love in not hesitating to ask the help of one whom she could never repay.

'Connor,' she said, 'there is no one in the world I wanted so much to see as you. I always seem to come to you in my troubles, and I want your advice more than I ever did.'

'I thought you would,' he said. 'We must have a good talk. Now where shall we go? I don't much want to meet my uncle. Do you mind the rain?'

'Not a bit,' she replied. 'We can walk, or get shelter in one of the sheds.'

'It is like old times again,' said he, as they passed the gates of the outer yard and caught a glimpse of the horses tackled to the capstan arms of the threshing machine. 'Not a trace of the hotel. How well I remember the time when I used to look over here from the other side of the boundary fence to an undiscovered country, and the eventful afternoon when you first took me round the place. It is just the same, with some of the mystery gone.'

'And afterwards on that windy evening when you took me over to the Castle,' said Kathleen, 'and left me in the tower. And do you remember the dinner-party that you and Michael came to after my accident?'

'I suppose boy and girl lovers seldom marry.'

he remarked ; 'but they make the best friends.' He spoke lightly of their relationship, determined that no distress on his account should be added to the burden she had to bear, and Kathleen seemed to catch his generous intention. She gave him a smile that rewarded him for the moment, but became an illumination of his sorrow when he recalled it afterwards.

In the big shed in the haggard they found a sheltered resting-place. Kathleen sat on the shaft of a cart and Connor leant against one of the posts of the shed and lighted his pipe, his whole attitude being singularly unlike that of a disconsolate lover.

'Well,' he said, 'we're in for a big fight.'

'Connor, it is such a comfort to me to know that you are with Michael—helping him, I mean. After the Buttevant meeting I thought——'

'Little differences of policy are forgotten now,' said Connor. 'It is a question of standing by your captain or deserting him. It will be a hard fight, but we shall win in the end. Michael has won the hearts of the people. They will have no other leader.'

'He is overworking himself, Connor. I thought when I saw him last week he looked dreadfully worn. Couldn't you make him take a rest?'

'Nobody can, not even you. You saw him last week?'

'For a short half-hour. He drove out to see me from Mallow. I don't think he even went home.'

Connor was wondering whether he had yet faced his ordeal of telling Kathleen the whole truth. He concluded from her manner that he had not done so.

'My greatest trouble is in not being able to help him,' she continued. 'Everything has become very

difficult for me. You know I cannot suddenly forget my old sympathies. I feel like a deserter to my own party and my own people in joining yours, and yet I must do so; and my hope was that I might perhaps influence Michael and bring him to look less bitterly on the landlords. But now, when I hear the things they say against him, when I find them eager to believe the cruel lies about him—about him and Lady Desmond—all my feelings are changed, and I hate the people who attack him, and my only desire is to be able to help him.'

Connor's heart sank. What would she feel when she knew the truth? How would Michael be able to face the ordeal of telling her? And yet he still felt that it was imperative that he should tell her, if there was to be any real bond of love between them.

'And I feel so miserable on my father's account,' she went on. 'I don't mind much what any one else thinks about my marrying Michael, but it will be a terrible blow to him.'

'You have a trial before you that very few girls could stand,' said Connor, 'but you will go through it all right. And remember that you can count on me as a brother.'

Again a pang shot through his heart at the thought of the crowning sorrow in store for her when she heard Michael's confession. If he had had to make it himself he could hardly have felt more acutely, and for a moment the easy course of concealment and falsehood presented itself to him as an alternative to the cruelty of telling the truth. He rejected it because he believed in the nobility of Kathleen's nature, and in the love that covereth a multitude of sins; indeed, he believed that a union that was founded on deception would end in misery.

He could do nothing towards paving the way for Michael, or so little that it seemed to him nothing ; yet it was with a step in this direction in view that he began speaking of his brother's finer qualities, his unflinching courage and devotion to his country, adding a footnote about the weaknesses of great men, and protesting that if Michael had been guilty of the charges brought against him it would not have justified his desertion by his friends.

'But of course you never doubted him even before he told you the charge was false,' said Kathleen ; and Connor could only reply, and it was the truth, that he had not doubted him.

'And what about the hotel ?' he asked. 'Can it be carried on after you are married ?'

'I don't know what will happen, Connor. They can never get on without me. Michael says that he will undertake that my people shall be saved from ruin. But what can he do ? My father would rather starve than accept his help. There is no immediate fear, because Mr. Barrington has taken up the mortgages, and of course he will not press us for overdue interest—another humiliation. How long are you staying, Connor ?'

'Only to-night, but I shall be back again next week. Michael is going to speak at Cork, and there is the Mallow election on the 20th. It will be the first great fight, a test of our strength. The parliamentarians, or whatever the deserters call themselves, have nominated a man called Sullivan, and Michael wants me to stand against him.'

'You, Connor !'

'Yes, and if he cannot get a better man I must. I don't wish for a political career, Kathleen. It is not my game, but now I cannot keep out of the

fight. There are times when fighting, and fighting against odds, is the finest thing in the world.'

'You are the best brother and the truest friend that ever lived,' she said, and the tears gathered in her eyes as she spoke. She was not deceived by his manner into believing that the wound which love had inflicted was healed. She knew it was not so, and she loved him more than ever for his generosity and brave bearing. Hero-worship had inspired her love for Michael and had called forth her devotion and loyalty; friendship had so mingled with her feelings for Connor that it concealed from her own knowledge the depth and tenderness of the hidden love.

She accompanied him on his way home as far as the lodge. In the twilight of the winter afternoon the soft rain was still falling, and the darkening country looked lonely and cheerless. Nor was there for either of them that prospect of the bright fireside and merry faces within doors that so cheers the heart at shut of eve. For him the stern grey tower of the Castle, looming in the mist, seemed home no longer; for her the old home of her fathers looked alien. She who had been its mistress, who had fought so hard to save it from ruin, was about to leave it, to be thought a deserter by her family. A vision returned to her of the old days—happy in spite of poverty—when the schoolroom window, dark now, beckoned her to a jolly tea-party of unruly young brothers; and her heart sank as she pictured her father wandering about the place of which he now hardly considered himself the master, and her brother Jack hanging about the stables, discontented and pessimistic, brooding on their fallen fortunes. And now she was going to leave them, and she

hardly dared to contemplate what would happen. The hotel could not be carried on without her, and it seemed to her inevitable that the old place would have to be given up; perhaps not sold, for it occurred to her that Mr. Barrington had made himself so much at home there that he might like to rent it; and after awhile, with Michael's help, she might bring the family together again. She had not abandoned the great hope of using her influence with Michael for the promotion of a better feeling between his party and that of her people, nor forgotten her dream of the national union of all those who loved and laboured for their country. It was a noble dream—not impossible of realisation under the inspiration of Desmond's genius if he had made it his aim; but it was her dream, not his; and now, in the desperate fight which had been brought upon him by his own dishonour, he had little thought for anything but dealing his enemies the hardest blows he could strike.

In other circumstances Kathleen would have postponed her marriage until she saw some means of helping her family out of their difficulties, but now she felt that her first duty was to Michael. She must stand by him even though she deserted her family. He was discredited and condemned, but she could show her faith in him. A glow of joy went through her in realising that by marrying him at once, by showing the world that she believed in his innocence, she would strengthen the faith of others in him, and help him as perhaps no one else could. This idea took possession of her; she wondered she had not thought of it before, and grew eager to act on her inspiration—restless until she had written to Michael about it.

She did so that evening in a letter expressing devotion and courage which would have renewed the strength of any lover whose heart was not burdened by a dishonourable secret. There was no note of hesitation. She claimed her right to stand beside him, and she urged him to make immediate arrangements for their marriage, offering to come to him the moment he gave the word. When her letter was written, and she saw imminent the step which was to change her whole life, though she did not waver a moment in her decision, a great sadness came over her. Now that she was about to leave the old place, perhaps never to return to it, she understood how passionately she loved it. Now that she was about to desert her people her heart yearned towards them with unspeakable tenderness.

The house was dark and silent. As Kathleen came downstairs from her room she could hardly believe that a month or two before it had been full of strangers. Its old glamour was upon the place again; it had its old dignity. She was full of memories of her childhood—of games of hide-and-seek in the dark corridors and recesses and those mysterious, awe-inspiring, deserted bedrooms used for storing wool; of merry gatherings in the school-room, and the hopeless attempts of Mr. O'Toole and Miss Green to preserve order; of evenings when there was a dance in the barn, and she and Jack used to steal out in disobedience to orders and watch the fun from the top of the piles of oat-sheaves, stored for threshing, that rose almost to the roof. The place was the same, but the thought that she was about to leave it gave everything a new significance. With a heavy heart she went in search of her father.

and found him seated at a table in his little room, gloomily reading a tract by the light of a candle. She came behind him and put her arms round his neck, and laid her cheek against his.

'What about a game of backgammon?' she asked.

He did not move. She felt the touch of a tear against her cheek. 'You're the only one that ever comes near me,' he said. 'There is no love left. You're the only one I can turn to.'

She suffered acutely. How could she desert him? How could he bear her marriage to the man he considered to be the chief instrument of his misfortunes?

'We all love you,' she said; 'but you know the boys are shy of showing their feelings, and——'

He broke into one of his tirades. 'Shy!' said he, brushing his tract away with a wave of his hand. 'By the powers, I like their shy way of showing their love! "You might have a bit more pride about you, sir," said I to Jack this very evening, "than be spending half your time smoking among the stable-boys"; and, says he, "What pride would be expected from the son of a hotel-keeper?" throwing in me teeth what's already sticking in me throat and choking me. Me own children look down on me, and know I'm not master in me own home. Barrington's master. He has the mortgages, and could turn us out any day he liked; and "'tis Mr. Barrington this," and "Mr. Barrington that," from me own servants. I am a by-word among the people. What were David's words? "We are become an open scorn and derision to them that are round about us," not that I care a thrawneen for *their* opinion. "I am become like a pelican in the

wilderness and a pillibeen-meek¹ in the desert," or maybe 'twas an owl,' he added.

'Yes, 'twas an owl,' Kathleen smiled. 'We must give up the hotel, father. Could you bear to leave the place for a few years?'

He looked up at her perplexed.

'I believe we could let it. I believe Mr. Barrington would take the house and the demesne on a lease for a term, and if you could bear to leave it for a while would it not be best? You—we could take a small house in Mallow or Queenstown or somewhere till times were better. I want you to promise to try and arrange it with Mr. Barrington. I think he would like to carry on the hotel himself. It would amuse him. The rent he would pay would cover the interest on the mortgages, and we should have our own rents from the tenants to live on, very quietly, and I have something left too. Jack could stay on and look after the farm for Mr. Barrington. You see, if I were sure of being here to look after the hotel—for a first year it has done very well—but I might not be here.'

'And where else would you be?' he interrupted.

'Oh, I don't know. I might want to get married, or—I'm tired of it too,' she said desperately. 'It would be better to let the place. Let me see Mr. Barrington about it, will you, dear?'

'Indeed I will,' said he in a tone of satisfaction. 'When you turned me into a hotel-keeper I did not complain. Fifteen generations of O'Briens, beginning with a king, and ending with a licence to sell spirits. By the law, 'twas a bitter pill! but 'twas the will o' God, and I swallowed it.'

'Yes,' she said, 'I think I can arrange with Mr.

¹ Pillibeen-meek = a green plover.

Barrington, and we will try and settle it at once. It will only be for a few years, and then you—then we can come home and have things as they used to be.'

Her heart misgave her as she spoke.

'Don't make the lease too long, Kathleen,' he pleaded. 'I am an old man. I should like to come back and die in the old place.'

It was not the picture of her father's trouble in having to leave his home that was distressing Kathleen. She knew that, in spite of his protestations against pride, his own pride was so great that he would welcome any relief from the humiliation he felt in his present position. What dismayed her was the thought of the blow that was in store for him when he heard of her alliance with Michael Desmond. Never had a brave girl's heart been more cruelly torn between two conflicting duties. To keep her engagement a secret, to postpone her marriage and to remain by her father was the easier, and this she would have done if the man she loved had stood innocent before the world. His condemnation by the world decided her. His career was at stake; he was attacked not only by his former enemies but by his former friends; he was condemned by the world when she knew him to be innocent. If she delayed, it would be too late: she could help him now as it seldom fell to the lot of a girl to help her lover, by showing the world her faith.

She astounded her father, always accustomed to find her calm and undemonstrative, by a sudden outburst of feeling.

'Father!' she cried, again flinging her arms round his neck, 'dear, dear father, if ever I do anything that seems unkind, that seems wanting in love for

you, promise me, dear father, promise to forgive me! Promise to remember what I am saying now, that when you think I am cruel I am loving you more than ever, and that nothing can ever come between us—nothing I could do could make you not love me. Promise me!’ Her tears flowed fast. She kept her face hidden in her father’s shoulder.

‘What, my pet!’ he exclaimed in a sort of alarm. ‘What is it? Don’t be troubling now, my pet. You have too much to think of, and you’re bothered about me, and you who have all the trouble of the family on yourself.’ It aroused him to find himself in the position of comforter and exhorter with Kathleen, so accustomed had he become to a reversal of these parts. ‘No,’ he said, ‘we are going to win our battle yet, and I must try and help you a bit more, my dear. Would you mind,’ he spoke very apologetically—‘would you mind if we said a little prayer together?’

CHAPTER XXVI

VOX POPULI

WITH the exception of the few lines which Corinna had sent to Desmond asking for an interview on the evening of the conclusion of the trial, she had not attempted to communicate with him. He had left her note unanswered, and she had made no further sign. Whatever her feelings might be, she was too proud to plead with him. Towards her his chief feeling was resentment. At the moment when his fame was brightest, when the labours of his life were on the verge of consummation, she had brought disaster upon him. He did not excuse himself, but he had no pity for her. Not that he imagined that she stood in need of pity. She was not one of those women who need the support, the protection of a man ; she had made no secret of her scorn for the dependent woman ; she had played her part deliberately. His heart was further hardened by the belief that the judgment of the Court would have been in his favour if Corinna had come forward as he had expected—as she had promised—and denied the charges brought against him. If her object had been to obtain freedom from the bondage of her marriage she had achieved it ; if she had contemplated a subsequent marriage with himself she had

amazingly miscalculated. She had misread him if she imagined he would marry the woman whose love was not great enough to make her come to his aid at a desperate juncture—who had preferred to allow him to stand face to face with political ruin. And yet though he felt for her neither pity nor love, he could not forget her ; though her fascinations had all but wrecked his career, their memory could still quicken his pulses. They had won him from his faith to Kathleen, but his passion was ashes now ; and he turned with a tenderer love, a stronger faith, to the brave-hearted girl who had shown her loyalty to him when all the world condemned. He read the letter in which Kathleen urged him to allow their marriage to take place at once with a glow of pride in her. It stimulated while it humiliated him. It ennobled her in his sight, and made him dread more than ever the ordeal of fulfilling his promise to Connor, and confessing the truth to her before their marriage. He would have sacrificed everything except his political career, which was the breath of his life, to have been able to go to her with a clear conscience.

And why should she know? he asked himself again. He hesitated, not from fear that knowledge of the truth would make her refuse to marry him,—he shared Connor's faith in the generosity of her nature, the greatness of her love, and believed that she would forgive him. But the cruelty of it ! The contemplation of the scene in which he, whom she trusted so magnificently, would have to tell her that her faith was without foundation, was more than he could bear. He turned away from it.

That his marriage to Kathleen in the present crisis of his fortunes might be of practical advantage to him he saw at once, but it was not on that account

that he accepted her proposal. He did not at first agree to it. In his reply to her letter he brought a flush of joy to her face by his words of fervent love and gratitude, but he urged the postponement of their marriage until the present storm was over, and they could enter on their new life under happier skies.

‘I should miss the beauty of the clear skies if I had not been with you in the storm,’ she wrote again; ‘and unless I am at your side in the fight I shall not deserve to share the victory with you.’

It was the answer he desired. He felt that he had found his mate. With such a girl beside him he could fight his battles with renewed strength. The sooner she came to him the better; and if he had to make confession to her, the sooner that was done the better. If!—but why should he undeceive her? how could he torture her? She might forgive him; but would it not be the forgiveness of a broken heart?

‘It shall be as you wish,’ he wrote, in reply to her second letter. ‘Indeed, I cannot do without you. You come to me in my hour of misfortune, but I know that there will dawn a day when Ireland will be as proud of you for this as I am now. I have written to my mother,’ he said later on; ‘she has always been my best adviser and truest friend. Do not wait till I come, Kathleen, go over and see her. She will welcome you with loving arms. I shall be at home before the Mallow election, and we can then arrange our plans. Next Thursday is fixed for my meeting in Cork, the most important meeting since the crash. It is to be open to every one, and I shall feel the pulse of Ireland. I shall know whether I am still the leader of my countrymen. If my mother is going you might accompany her; or would you rather wait until after our marriage before appearing at my side in public? My heart is touched when I think of what

it will cost you to leave your people, and of the pain it will cause your father. But if my duty to my country has made me the enemy of his class, my love for you will help me to find a way of winning his confidence and claiming the right to serve him.'

That last sentence gave Kathleen her chief comfort at this time.

The meeting in Cork was a memorable one. No such popular demonstration had been witnessed in the country since the great gathering in the Rotunda at Dublin on the occasion of Desmond's liberation from prison. But there was this marked difference between the two meetings. At the Rotunda the multitude had been unanimous; it came to greet the national hero; it spoke with one voice. At the Cork meeting, the vast throng that filled the hall, the thousands that could not gain admittance and crowded the approaches, were divided in allegiance, hostile to each other, in doubt of their own convictions. There, popular emotion had been concentrated; here, it was undirected, and hung wavering between fanatical allegiance and a readiness to break in fragments the fallen idol.

Desmond's opponents had been working as hard as he. The verdict of the Divorce Court had been used to the utmost in their efforts to damage his character. He was branded as a traitor for fighting to retain the leadership of the party instead of resigning it for the good of the country. The Catholic clergy, conscientiously but sorrowfully, had condemned him. Among the thoughtful there was doubt, hesitation, and pain; in the multitudes, unrest, anger at the situation, an intense desire to see him and hear him speak in his own defence, a

compulsion either to acclaim him their hero or destroy him—they hardly knew which.

The meeting was an open one, but the platform was entirely occupied by Desmond's friends and delegates from his supporters all over the country. The chairman was Mr. Sheehan, one of the members for the city; its other Nationalist representative, Mr. Blake, being in the opposite camp.

At eight o'clock, the hour fixed for the meeting, Desmond had not arrived. The crowd was impatient and disorderly, and Mr. Sheehan looked out in some anxiety on the turbulent scene beneath him. He turned and made a signal to the organist of the hall who was in attendance, and for some minutes the confusion of voices was lost in the surge of music.

During this interlude Connor Desmond came on to the platform with his mother and Kathleen O'Brien, and led them to seats near the chairman. They were the only ladies present. Mrs. Desmond looked quite calm, but Kathleen was pale with excitement. She dimly saw the mass of people and heard the organ. The man who was to be her husband was about to hear the verdict of the people, and she was herself there to testify to her faith in him. The music ceased; its effect on the people had been to excite not to soothe. At its conclusion a wilder tumult than before arose in the hall. Cries of 'Desmond!' 'Desmond!' 'God save Ireland!' 'Traitor!' 'Where is our leader?' rang out above the babel of voices.

There was something unhuman, something akin to the elemental forces of nature when they threaten man, in the collective fury of the multitude. Kathleen was frightened. As she looked down

on the vast assemblage of people she experienced for the first time in her life the fascination of multitude. Connor was hardly less under its spell. It was a living whole in whose being their own individuality was lost. It was like a great tree in whose branches the wind was roaring, and they were but as leaves on the tree. She looked round for Michael, but he had not arrived. A message was brought to the chairman; he exchanged a few words with Connor, and then rose to speak. After endeavouring unsuccessfully to command silence he made the best of such hearing as he could obtain, and begged the audience to be patient. Mr. Desmond, he said, had met with a slight accident on his way through the crowd, but would be there almost immediately. In the meantime he hoped that order would be preserved, while Mr. Donovan, who had done so much for the cause in America, addressed them.

Mr. Donovan rose, but after his first few sentences he found it impossible to proceed. He tried good-natured banter and indignant reproach in turn, and finally abandoned his attempt. Once more the organ was put in requisition, and this time the musician made happy choice of a stirring tune with rebel words, known to every one present. Some began singing, and in a moment the refrain was taken up all over the hall :—

Oh the French are on the sea
Says the Shan Van Vogh¹;
The French are on the sea,
Says the Shan Van Vogh.

The chorus grew louder, and as the final lines

¹ Sean bean bocht—poor old woman = Ireland.

rang out the sound of the organ was almost drowned in the volume of the voices :

The French are in the Bay,
They'll be here without delay,
And the Orange shall decay,
Says the Shan Van Vogh !

These few minutes of unanimity were inspiriting. The rebel blood in old Mrs. Desmond was fired and her eyes brightened. She looked round for Michael ; it was a moment fitted for his appearance, but he was not there. The music ceased, the moment passed, the tumult began again. Cheers were given in one part of the hall for Mr. Blake and answered by counter cheers for Desmond. At the back of the building actual fighting was going on. The audience was becoming a riotous mob. The chairman had lost all control, and it looked as if the meeting would be broken up.

The confusion was at its worst when Desmond arrived. His entrance was the signal for every one on the platform to stand up. His arm rested in a sling and he was pale, but there was not the slightest trace of excitement or agitation in his face or manner. A tremendous roar of cheering, mingled with hostile shouts and groans, greeted his entry, and continued while he crossed the platform and shook hands with the chairman. He bowed to his audience and to his friends on the platform, and then took a seat next to his mother. His composure was not feigned. He had the rare gift of perfect self-control ; he had the still rarer power of finding the full measure of his strength in the hour of emergency. His genius won inspiration from danger ; the crisis which quickened his pulses

cleared his brain. In contemplating the scene before him his spirit rose ; he was conscious of his strength. He exchanged a few words with his mother, whose composure was almost equal to his own, and he answered Kathleen's anxious questioning look with a reassuring smile. 'I can never be beaten with you at my side,' he whispered to her. His confidence was not shared by his friends. Though the tumult had slightly abated it broke out again with the chairman's attempt to introduce Desmond, nor did it cease when he sat down, and the man himself, whom they were waiting to judge, stood before them. At this moment the storm of voices rose to its wildest, but there was this change in the attitude of the multitude : previously their attention had been undirected ; now every eye in the building was fixed on Desmond.

He waited with his uninjured arm resting on the table, and looked out over the tempestuous scene as calmly as a man, secure on a rock, may watch a raging sea breaking at his feet. His commanding figure, his strong, handsome face, marked him for a leader of men ; and he stood now, not as one who had come to plead, but as one who was there to be obeyed.

The uproar continued, but gradually a change, almost imperceptible at first, came over it. Its volume did not diminish, but it became less discordant. Cries were no longer answered by counter cries, and by degrees the sounds acquired a rhythmical beat. The acclamation, whether friendly or hostile, was becoming unanimous, there was an element of order in the tumult. Every moment the change became more marked. The regular waves of sound had a subdued note, as of a distant

sea, with a murmured undertone, a whispered hush. Desmond knew that he had won his hearing. He took a step to the front of the platform and held up his arm. The cheers ceased; the murmur died away; almost suddenly there was a complete silence. In the hall where for half an hour had raged a cyclone of furious uproar, it was now so still that the voices in the street outside could be heard. Desmond began to speak, and with his first sentence his audience was won.

‘England,’ he said, ‘has commanded you to abandon me. I think I know you well enough to be sure that you will not allow your enemies to choose your leader. I have compelled England to recognise that Ireland is a nation of free men, not a subject state. I have led you to the gates of victory, and I hold the key of that gate in my hand. Destroy me at the bidding of England, and you destroy your own liberties for another generation!’

He paused a moment. There were no cheers, but an inarticulate sound went through the hall as though the people had held their breath when he spoke, and were again breathing.

‘You made me your leader,’ he continued, ‘and because I have led you triumphantly, England hates me. She would conquer you by destroying your captain. Conspiracy after conspiracy has been formed against me and has failed. Now the last, the basest of all, has succeeded. An English Court has condemned me. But do you accept the verdict of an English Court? To me it is nothing. My countrymen are my only judges. You are my Court of Appeal. If you condemn me, I accept your judgment. If you acquit me, I am still your leader.’

A tremendous burst of cheering—unanimous and prolonged—answered Desmond's appeal. He turned and exchanged glances with his mother. Kathleen was no longer pale; her eyes were bright with excitement; she had seen her hero in battle and she was proud of him. Connor's pulses were racing. All the admiration he had felt for his brother as a boy fired him again. He also looked on his hero.

'I stand firm,' Desmond continued, when the cheering ceased. 'You have delivered your judgment. Men of Cork, to-night you have shown your loyalty; to-morrow all Ireland will follow you! And your noble example is needed, for it is not only England we have to fight against, but against enemies in our own camp. I cannot but despise them—I pity them more that, being Irishmen, they could have been guilty of abandoning their captain in the midst of the fight and have put their faith in the promise of a perfidious enemy. Fellow-countrymen, never trust England! Every reform, every concession we have won, has been won by force. Never trust England! and never trust the Irishman who asks you to put your faith in England!'

Every word he spoke was listened to with breathless attention, and the occasional outbursts of applause were followed by perfect silence.

He went on to give his audience a stirring account of the struggle for self-government in Ireland, and the successive victories which had been won on the way to it during the term of his leadership. He touched the rebel note occasionally with marked effect. He spoke of Ireland's past wrongs and of her heroes who had died for the national

cause, and at the point when his eloquence had completely captivated his hearers he seized the opportunity to strike a blow at those who had deserted him.

‘I have a page of family history to relate to you,’ he said. ‘You have heard of the bloody statutes of Queen Anne—those laws which were made for the destruction of all who remained true to their religious faith. One of these statutes ordained that in any estate belonging to a Catholic family, if a younger brother abandoned his faith and became a Protestant, he disinherited the elder brother who remained true to the faith of his country and his fathers. Nearly two centuries ago this act of treachery was committed in my family. There were two brothers. The younger turned Protestant and inherited the estates. I am the descendant of the elder brother who was disinherited. Sir Henry Desmond, one of those who has now conspired against me, is the descendant of the traitor who robbed him. But it is not of him I would speak. It is of the way in which a shameful page of history is being repeated. We, the Nationalist party, were one family, bound together by our faith; but now we have been divided. That section of our party which has allied itself with England is the treacherous younger brother, duped by English promises, spurred by personal ambitions. By the support of the Nonconformists and Orangemen, by forswearing its old allegiance, this band of deserters claims the inheritance of your confidence. But, my friends, though it was once in England’s power to deprive you of your civil rights and your religious liberties, though English laws could once drive from his lands the man who remained true to the faith of his fathers,

England has never had the power to rob the man you have chosen to lead you of the proud possession of your trust. Fellow-countrymen, your confidence, your loyalty, is the inheritance I claim !'

If any doubt remained of Desmond's hold on the affections of the people, the storm of applause that answered this appeal to them dispelled it. Assured now of the support of the meeting he went on to speak of the future. There were men now representing Irish constituencies, he told them, who in abandoning him at the dictation of an English party had also abandoned the cause of their country. These men must be got rid of. At every election he would bring forward a candidate who would oppose the deserter. He was confident of the same support all over Ireland as he had found in Cork that evening. And when the Nationalist ranks were purged of these weaklings and time-servers, he would lead against the enemy of Ireland a force which would be stronger than it had ever been before. His concluding sentence, spoken with impressive solemnity and listened to with rapt attention, echoed for many a day in the memories of his hearers.

'My countrymen,' he said, 'I have led you to victory in the past ; with God's help I will lead you to greater victories in the future ! Though my life has not been free from blame, though for many things I stand in need of forgiveness, I can claim this—that never in thought, or word, or deed, have I been untrue to my country, or forgotten the trust that Irishmen have confided in me.'

He sat down, and as he did so his supporters on the platform rose to their feet and the hall became a scene of unparalleled enthusiasm. Admiration for the man, loyalty to their leader, self-

reproach for past doubts of him, anger against his detractors, and the fighting spirit his speech had aroused—all found utterance in the thunder of acclamation which followed.

Kathleen grew faint ; for the last hour she had borne the strain of intense excitement. Now that it was over her strength failed : the whole scene grew dreamlike before her. A few minutes later, when she recovered her self-control, she found herself standing with her arm in Connor's on the platform, and saw Michael descending the steps to the body of the hall. Crowded as it was, a pathway had been made down its whole length for Desmond to pass through. The organist, with an instinct for dramatic effect, had sounded a peal of triumphant music, but no one heeded it. Every eye was on Desmond who, bowing occasionally as he went, receiving the acclamation which greeted him as calmly as a general might take the salute of an army, passed down through the multitude in whose hearts he was enthroned.

CHAPTER XXVII

DESMOND AND KATHLEEN—THE MORNING

THE account of Desmond's meeting in Cork which Mr. Dan Barrington found in his newspaper next morning was not pleasant reading to the old gentleman ; but though every sentence of his nephew's speech kindled his wrath, the real cause of his displeasure arose from the fact that Mrs. Desmond and Connor had been present. The blow dealt by recent events to the Nationalist party and to Desmond's career had given Mr. Barrington a triumph over his sister in which he had recognised that luck had been against her : he had felt something like pity for her at first, picturing a disheartened woman and a distressed mother ; but now she was shown to him unbroken in pride, appearing on a public platform with Connor, whom he had used every effort to detach from her political policy, at her side. In his fight with his proud sister he was compelled to admit himself beaten. ' We can get along very well without you, Dan—you and your money-bags,' she had said on the first occasion when he had proposed to her to make Connor his heir ; and the words still rankled in his mind. He had no doubt she was now laughing at him in the same contemptuous way that had goaded him once in childhood to inflict

corporal punishment on her. But if the prospect of out-manceuvring his sister had been dear to him, far dearer was his hope of making Connor his heir. He had been indulgent to the young man's Nationalist sympathies, and had finally stipulated no more than his repudiation of his brother's extremer views; now he found him supporting Michael on a platform from which he had almost advocated open rebellion. He was sincerely attached to Connor; at the bottom of his heart he admired him for standing by his brother in his hour of need; but his own convictions, his own pride and self-respect, made it impossible for him to withdraw the conditions he had made, or endow with his hard-won fortune a man who defied his wishes and supported the principles he detested.

He was also irritated and not a little puzzled by Kathleen's presence at the meeting. After Connor, there was no one he was so much attached to as Kathleen. The marriage of these two was a cherished part of his scheme, and he had counted on her to win Connor's sympathies from the party which was eager for the destruction of the class to which she belonged; but now she seemed to have been won herself to the other side. Her conduct was unaccountable; for he knew her loyalty to her family and its political traditions, and was sure that she would not do a thing which would give pain to her father for the mere indulgence of a whim. And politics apart, it was deplorable that a young lady, unescorted by a relation, should appear in public on the same platform with a man who had just failed to clear his name of disgrace in the Divorce Court. His inability to find any reason for her conduct, except in the machinations of his sister, added to his

displeasure. For the first time since he had known Kathleen he was angry with her, and he determined to speak his mind to her very clearly on the first opportunity.

It was Mr. Barrington's custom to drive into Mallow once or twice a week and spend an hour at the Club. This morning before setting out he rang his bell and sent a message by Conceen Cal to the ladies of the house asking to be allowed a few minutes' conversation with one of them.

In the hearts of Miss Bridget and Miss Honora the message produced a little flutter, which was accentuated by the memory of a talk they had had with Mrs. Spencer Boyle a day or two before. That merry-hearted dame was never tired of rallying the Ballyvodra ladies on their matrimonial prospects, and had many times told them that Mr. Barrington was ready to be led by one of them to the altar. 'The only reason he does not propose is that he cannot make up his mind between you,' said she in their recent conversation.

'Ah, Mrs. Boyle, you're talking nonsense,' and 'Indeed, Mrs. Boyle, you're mistaken,' they had replied.

'Well,' said their neighbour, 'ask anybody! Ask Spincer! "Dan Barrington'd make a first-rate husband for one of the gerrls," says he to me in bed last night, "and I believe he's in love. Last time I was over, I saw him pick up a piece of embroidery that one of them had left on the hall table," says he, "and he laid it down with a sigh and went straight to the bar and ordered a stimulant." 'Tisn't much escapes Spincer.'

Now the unusual message brought back the conversation to their minds.

'Which of us did Mr. Barrington mention?' Miss Bridget asked.

'Indeed, Miss, I forget, but it was one o' ye,' replied Coneen.

'Give Mr. Barrington our compliments, and say Miss Bridget will be in the drawing-room in a few minutes,' Miss Honora instructed the boy.

'My dear, I can't assume it was I he wished to see,' said Miss Bridget after the door was closed.

'My dear, you are the elder,' her sister replied with unselfish devotion.

An affectionate dispute followed and ended by a decision that they should both go, and the sisters hurried to their bedrooms to make a few additions to their toilet. It was decided between them to wear hats.

As they entered the drawing-room with some trepidation they found Mr. Barrington impatiently pacing the floor. His manner was always gallant with them, and he did not forget to pay each of them a compliment before entering upon his business. Having inquired and found that they had not seen the morning paper, he told them briefly of Kathleen's presence at the meeting in Cork, and asked whether they could throw any light on the circumstance. They were much distressed and quite incapable of accounting for it.

'Twas with Mrs. Major Pym she went to stay,' said Miss Bridget.

'And we're expecting her home this afternoon,' added Miss Honora.

'I don't want her father to hear of it,' said Mr. Barrington. 'I know you get the paper, and I want you to destroy it to prevent any chance of his reading about the meeting. 'Tis inexplicable. I cannot

understand the girl. The poor old man has troubles enough, and if she—but you must see her directly she arrives. I will speak to her also. The good name of your family is for certain reasons very dear to me.'

'You have been very good to us,' said Miss Bridget. 'We can never repay you.'

'We feel we can rely on you,' said Miss Honora timidly.

'We can speak to you on our private affairs almost as if you were a bro——'

'A cousin,' suggested Miss Honora.

'My dear young ladies, the obligation is on my side,' said Mr. Barrington. 'You have given me a home, one I should be sorry to have to leave, and an alliance between your family and mine is—well, it is not the time to speak of that now. I hope Kathleen will be able to give some explanation. By the way, she was talking to me the other day about giving up the hotel and my taking a lease of Ballyvodra. I should be lonely here by myself.'

The sisters kept their eyes on the floor.

'No, at present I think it is much better that things should go on as they are. I confess the hotel amuses me, and as a business man I don't like to see a venture dropped when it is beginning to succeed. But I must have a further conversation with you about this; your views would affect my decision. And now I am just off to Mallow. Have you any commands for the town?'

On his way to the Club in Mallow Mr. Barrington found a crowded street. The election campaign had opened; it was also a Fair-day, and on the conclusion of business the people had remained to meet Desmond, who was expected to arrive from Cork with his

candidate before noon. Some gentlemen standing on the Club steps were watching the crowd on its way to the station as Mr. Barrington drove up.

'We're out of this fight,' said Major Boyle, who was among them. 'We can look on and see them break each other's heads. They'll be letting the poor landlords alone for a bit.'

'The more I know of your country the less I understand it,' said an Englishman who was present. 'I never saw a friendlier scene than that Fair this morning. I didn't hear an uncivil word spoken to one of the landlords, or a word of politics of any kind; and to read the papers one would think you dare not show yourselves.'

'They're all right if the demagogues'll let 'em alone,' said Mr. Atkins, the resident magistrate. 'Good-morning, Barrington! He looks mighty cross,' he added as the old man passed into the Club. 'He's been reading the account of that meeting.'

'Old Barrington has pots of money,' Major Boyle told the Englishman, 'and being too old or too lazy to get himself an heir he's been trying to find a ready-made one among his relations, but they're all rebels, and he's a hot Tory. Desmond's his nephew. Hi, Linnahan,' he cried to a man he knew who was passing in a donkey-cart, 'tell me which of the two patriots ought I to vote for?'

'Wisha, then, is it thrue your honour has a vote?' asked the man with feigned surprise.

''Tis bringing the franchise down pretty low, but 'tis a fact he *has* a vote,' said one of the Major's companions; and as Mr. Linnahan passed on and heard the laughter he had provoked, a grin of satisfaction spread over his face.

As the time for the arrival of the train drew

nearer, the approach to the station became crowded. At the top of the incline where the people were most thickly packed Tom Begley, seated on an empty packing-case with his fiddle at his side, was reciting a poem which he had made in Desmond's honour and in denunciation of his enemies.

'And for once,' said he when he had concluded, 'for once—though 'tis me living—me hat will not go round. Divil a copper will I take for a word or two spoken for a hero that's fought our battles and done more for Ireland than anny man since Dan'l O'Connell.'

In another part of the crowd Costello was seen. Ever since the murder of Rahilly he had been avoided by his neighbours in spite of the verdict which had pronounced him innocent; but with an effrontery which showed a brutal courage he had remained in his own country. Now, with the nation divided into hostile camps, he relied for protection on Desmond's enemies, and hoped to turn to account the part he had played in the divorce suit. He was loathed for this even by those who condemned Desmond, but no one cared to run the risk of provoking a quarrel with him. He was feared.

Kathleen travelled down from Cork with Desmond and his party. For her a momentous decision had been made. With his usual readiness for prompt action when his resolution was taken, Desmond had procured a special license, and had proposed to her that they should be married in Dublin two days later. She had consented, stipulating only that, instead of keeping their secret until after the event as he had suggested, he should go with her to her father and tell him of their intention. Connor had been informed of the plan, and he also, with a pain in his heart which he strove in vain to master, approved the scheme

after receiving a repetition of his brother's promise to take Kathleen fully into his confidence.

'It is the worst thing I ever had to face,' said Michael, 'but I believe you are right. When you get to Mallow look after mother, and I will drive Kathleen home.'

Some details as to electioneering plans, and the arrangements for a meeting which was to be held in Mallow that evening, were discussed between them and Mr. Morrison, the candidate, on the journey from Cork, with a coolness and concentration of attention on Desmond's part which might have seemed remarkable even to one who did not know the agitating circumstances, past and imminent, that encompassed him.

It was a piece of good-luck for him that the first election of the campaign should have fallen in his own county. At Mallow he expected to win, and he had little fear as to the nature of his reception by the people on his arrival. His confidence was justified, and the few words in which he told them that he had arrived among old friends and neighbours who had known him all his life, not to defend himself, but to gather them round him for the fight, went straight to their hearts.

Two carriages drawn by horses decorated with green ribbands had been provided by his agent, and one of these he entered with Mr. Morrison, Connor and the ladies occupying the other. His own dogcart was also at the station, and before leaving he gave his man instructions to drive to the corner of the road leading from the town to Duhallow, and wait for him there.

An excited mass struggling to get close to the carriage made progress impossible for some minutes,

and when at last a way was cleared an incident occurred which made a further delay. A woman forced herself into the open space in front of the carriages, and held up both her arms. A superstitious import, almost a veneration, is given among the Irish peasantry to the words and actions of the demented, and the cheering crowd, recognising Mary Rahilly, became instantly silent. The other carriage was close enough for its occupants to hear her outcry.

‘Michael Desmond,’ she said, ‘I laid me curse on you once, and sorrow it brought you. I take it off now, if God will let me and ’tis not too late. I cursed you because you definded the man that murdered my husband, and you knowin’ he was guilty. And that man you saved from hangin’ has turned agin’ you. May he burn in hell! But may God forgive me that I cursed you, and help you in your trouble, Michael Desmond!’

‘I am grateful to you, Mary,’ said Desmond gently, but inwardly much agitated. ‘I shall not forget your words.’ He signalled to the coachman to drive on.

‘And there,’ she cried in wilder accents, ‘there’s the murderer himself!’ She stretched out her hand towards Costello, who was standing about ten yards away, immediately in front of a section of the crowd which had held aloof from Desmond’s supporters.

Desmond stood up in the carriage, and a look of intense anger darkened his face.

‘Will you allow that man to remain among you?’ he asked, pointing to Costello. ‘That traitor, whose false witness has brought this trouble on our country! That malefactor, whom I saved from the gallows, and who in return lied about me for English pay! If you are my friends, if you respect your-

selves, turn the scoundrel out of the town. Let him find no shelter in the country he has betrayed. Treat him as a traitor should be treated !'

The carriage passed on. A movement was made towards Costello, but though he received no sign of support from those behind him, not a hand was laid on him. He stood coolly facing the people with a look on his malevolent countenance which acted like a spell on those who approached him. The people turned away from him as one with a pestilence. They surged past him in the track of the carriages. He spoke, but no one heard him, and at last he was left standing alone in the vacant roadway outside the station.

After accompanying Mr. Morrison to his hotel and making some final arrangements for the evening meeting, Desmond hastened to the place where he had ordered his man to meet him with the dogcart. He found Kathleen waiting for him. Connor remained in Mallow on election business, and Mrs. Desmond had gone on alone.

It was one of the days of our island winter when a message of spring comes in the south-west wind, and the January colour of the land is lighted by April skies. The sweetness of recent rain freshened the soft air ; the sounds of winter and spring comingled. Young lambs were bleating in the sunny fields, plover calling on the moorland, and in every hawthorn bush on the wayside the thrushes sang of the new-born year. The contrast between the quiet of the countryside and the trouble of the scenes they had recently witnessed seemed to strike Desmond and Kathleen at the same moment.

'Rest after stormy seas,' she said, turning to him with a smile.

‘But you are my real rest,’ he answered. ‘Without you I should be still thinking of the fight. You make me forget it. Your love gives me faith in life and in the future. That is rest.’

On the eve of her marriage, about to enter on an unknown path and to be divided from her family, with the ordeal before her of encountering her father’s anger and sorrow, she showed herself the brave comrade in ignoring her own trouble to think of cheering and inspiring the man who was to be her husband. She let her cheek rest for a moment on his shoulder.

‘I must do all I can to make you forget everybody except me for the next week,’ she said, laughing and blushing.

There was no one in sight and he kissed her. ‘For the next week, sweetheart!’ he echoed. ‘No, for the rest of my life.’

‘Well,’ she replied, ‘to be practical, how long shall we have for a honeymoon? There is this election.’

He warned her with a laugh to be prepared for a wedding-trip different from that of other brides—a honeymoon on which she would go through the country, not looking at scenery or visiting friends, but fighting his battles with him.

‘The thought of it fills me with pride, Michael,’ she said. ‘I mean I shall really be helping you. Those who might have believed those slanders about you will *know* they are untrue when they hear of our marriage.’

‘You are helping me as no one else could,’ he said, proud and at the same time humiliated by her splendid confidence in him. ‘You are giving up everything for me. You are leaving your people

and earning the reproach of your friends. I have been their bitter enemy, and I am still bound to fight against them, but I promise you that in future, instead of endeavouring to widen the breach, I will do what I honestly can to lessen it.'

The joy his words gave her shone in her eyes.

'And with that to look forward to I can go through anything,' she said. 'I can look beyond the present. In leaving them, instead of being wretched, I can laugh through my tears and think of the future.'

'Your father has never shown any personal hostility to me,' said Desmond reflectively.

'He never forgets that you saved my life.'

'It will be a difficult interview. Tell me, Kathleen, what is the amount of those mortgages on the property?'

'About twelve thousand pounds,' she answered.

'Beyond me at present,' he said; 'but perhaps one of these days, with the help of some of my friends, I can get the mortgages into my own hands and make you a present of them. Meanwhile I can guarantee the interest, so you need have no immediate fear about your father being bothered. I claim the right of doing this for you. Besides, I particularly dislike the thought of your family being under an obligation to my uncle.'

She pressed his hand. 'What a wonderful thing love is,' she said happily; 'it makes us accept the greatest gifts without hesitation, just as if they belonged to us already, and I have nothing but love to give you in return.'

A long hill fronted them and, at Kathleen's suggestion, they got out of the carriage and made

the ascent on foot. Below them the valley of the Blackwater and the purple mountains beyond it lay flooded in sunshine, and in front a couple of miles of bare upland country shut out the broad horizons of Duhallow.

It was a day to make merry hearts, and the promise of the spring which it bore had a special sweetness for a girl on her bridal eve. And Desmond too, as he walked up the hill holding Kathleen's hand, could have laughed at trouble if it had not been for the burden of the secret which divided him from his brave comrade. He was sorely distressed. If confession had to be made at all it must be now. He had promised Connor to go through with it; he had believed with Connor that she would forgive him, that her love was great enough to bear the trial, and that it would be an evil thing to marry her with a lie on his lips and an accursed secret between them; and now that the hour had come to face the ordeal the task appeared well-nigh impossible. His distress crippled him as a lover. With difficulties in front of her which few girls have to meet on the eve of marriage, about to incur the condemnation of her own people, deprived of all the happy accompaniments of bridal, Kathleen's need was an ardent wooer. At her bridal there was to be no gathering of friends, no loving farewells, not even the religious ceremony. Consideration for the pain it would give her father precluded her from being married with the rites of Desmond's church; on political grounds it was impossible that he should accept the service of hers; and, this being so, she had agreed to be satisfied, for the present at least, with the bald legality of the registry office. But a girl who can make this sacrifice needs a bold leader, a confident and

impetuous lover, to lift her up and hurry her onward at racing speed.

His secret became a warder to his fancies. She noticed his preoccupation and her spirits fell, though she made an effort to preserve an appearance of gaiety.

'You are thinking of your speech for that meeting to-night, Michael?' she laughed.

'No,' he replied; 'I was thinking about you, and all you have to go through for me, and I was wondering what your people think of me since that divorce suit, whether your father believed me guilty.'

Kathleen's colour rose. 'I am going to marry you, Michael. I know you are innocent,' she said with flashing eyes, 'and if my people could think otherwise I could almost forget my love for them. I would never again enter my father's house.'

He raised her hand to his lips; he had no words to express his homage or his remorse. His decision was taken then and there. Confession was impossible. He knew that he owed it to her; he knew that if he confessed there was hope of forgiveness; but confession was impossible. Perhaps some day, after their marriage, he might be able to face it, but not now. And why ever? Why should he exhume the buried sin? How could he torture that loving heart? The past was irrevocable; the future was his to devote to her service. His conscience—or was it Connor's conscience?—pleaded in vain. His answer was a foregone conclusion.

With his decision his spirits rose. The confessional dismissed from his mind he became an ardent lover, captivating her imagination, banishing her anxieties by the fervour of his words, the magnetism of his confident outlook.

‘Kathleen,’ he said, ‘you have become even dearer to me than my country, but my allegiance is not divided. To love you is to love Ireland. You have given me a dearer country and a greater cause.’

A girl whose hero had become her lover could hear no sweeter words.

‘With a comrade like you,’ he continued, ‘I can laugh at difficulties, and I believe we shall even succeed in conquering your own people and winning your father to forgive you for marrying me. I will do my utmost. And now I am going to forget everything in the world except the girl who in two days’ time will be my wife.’

The word wife and all it implied sent a thrill through her blood and brought the colour again to her face. She was a bonny-looking bride, sweet and inspiring as the message of the spring which gladdened that winter day with a promise of fuller warmth and the blossoming season to come.

‘Now,’ she laughed, ‘I must be practical, and we have not much time left for business. I suppose it never occurred to you that a girl has to think about her trousseau. I may have to borrow from my aunts. And you have to tell me about the train on Wednesday morning, and where we are to meet, and a hundred other things. What time will you come over this afternoon and see father?’ she added in a different tone.

‘I have to leave for Mallow at about seven o’clock,’ he said. ‘I will come over about five. We will settle everything else to-morrow. I almost think it will be better for you not to speak to your father until I come. Let us go to him together.’

‘Oh, Michael,’ she said, ‘if it were not for having to leave him, if it were not for the fear of grieving

him by marrying you, how perfectly happy I should be.'

They had reached the end of the high land and were at the verge of the long slope to Duhallow, with the broad horizon of the country they loved in view. Fifty miles of sunlit country, rolling pastures divided by stone walls and high banks, isolated folds of woodland and covert that encircled the great houses, tracts of moorland and sedgy wildernesses, lay between the distant peaks on the Kerry border in the west and the eastern mountain wall of the Galtees. And field and wood and mountain and moor were glowing in their winter colours of madder and dusky green and indigo, lighted in the splendour of an April sky, and deepened by the great shadows of slowly-moving clouds. The woods of Ballyvodra were below them, the old tower of Duhallow Castle stood out on the bare hillside, and the little river Alloa flashed in the sunshine as it wound its way from the uplands to its wooded cloisters farther down.

Desmond saw the restful look in Kathleen's eyes and half divined her thoughts.

'You are not going to be banished from the place you love,' he said. 'We must live in London while Parliament is sitting, but——'

'London?' she whispered merrily. 'I thought you were going to transfer it to Dublin.'

'Oh, all in good time,' he laughed. 'Meanwhile in London. And we must make our home here. There are several places to let.'

'The Court,' she suggested; 'but I know it is a tradition in your family not to cross its threshold until it belongs to you again.'

A disturbing memory assailed him. 'There is no luck about that place,' he answered.

'But wherever you take me, Michael, wherever we live,' she said, 'that place will be the best in the world.'

They had reached the cross-roads at the bottom of the hill, and here Kathleen suggested that instead of his driving her up to Ballyvodra she should leave him and walk the short distance that remained. Troubled as she was with the prospect of the ordeal awaiting her in the interview with her father, she kept up her show of good spirits until they parted. The smile she then gave Desmond was the sweetest assurance of love and brave comradeship a man could have desired from the girl he was about to wed. It haunted him after he had left her : it gave him more pain than joy. He knew that it was given to the man she believed him to be, not to the man he was.

Desmond had lost the great battle of his life on that evening when he had gone out to meet Corinna. His present failure to face the duty of confessing the truth to Kathleen was an inevitable consequence. He was no longer 'the master of his fate' or 'the captain of his soul.' The helm was unguarded ; he was borne on the tideway. 'Scruples exist for the weak, moral obligations for the timid. The strong man makes his own commandments and is not afraid to break them,' had been his contention in the past ; and in spite of this he had been compelled in an hour of crisis to a clear recognition of right and wrong and had made the fatal choice. Now his will struggled to reassert itself. 'Why,' it said, 'should he be damned by the past ? The future was his. Why should the world's conventions, why should Connor's conscience, affect his conduct ? He had sinned ; he was greater than his sin. Kathleen loved him and trusted him. Why should he harass her

with confession of unfaith when he was ready to make his whole life a proof of his devotion to her? It was his still to shape his destiny, to be uncoerced by circumstances.'

On the battlefield of the world's ambitions this achievement may be to the strong, but against spiritual forces the strongest man cannot prevail. Desmond was not now fighting against the world, he was fighting against God. To be the master of his fate a man must be on God's side. It was not the exercise of will in defiance of conscience—it was the sacrifice to truth, the courage to slay the lie that stood between him and the girl who trusted him, and to meet the consequences without flinching, that demanded the strength which proclaims a man greater than his sin. He was not the captain of his soul, but its tyrant. He went out to battle with his old courage, he still fought to win, but the forces he counted on were no longer under his control.

CHAPTER XXVIII

DESMOND, KATHLEEN, AND CORINNA—
THE AFTERNOON

KATHLEEN reached home in time for lunch. Her brother Jack was out hunting ; Mr. Barrington, who usually joined the family party when the hotel was empty, had not returned from Mallow, and Mr. O'Brien and his sisters were alone. It was a relief to her to find by her father's manner and the casual inquiry he made about the old friends, at whose house she had stayed in Cork, that no tidings of her presence at the meeting had reached him. Her aunts were significantly silent during the meal, and she herself became preoccupied. The good spirits she had shown when her lover was near deserted her. She escaped to her room at the first opportunity.

She had so much on her mind that she almost abandoned the attempt to direct her thoughts. Foremost among her anxieties was the coming interview with her father and the uncertainty as to how he would receive the news of her alliance with Desmond. Apart from his political objections to the man, he might accept the world's verdict on his moral conduct and refuse his consent to the marriage, in which case she would have to act in defiance of his wishes—a course she could hardly

bear to contemplate. Then, even if his consent were won, she knew he would give it with sorrow, and that, left without her, the burden of his position would be almost more than he could bear. There were a hundred things to settle : arrangements to be made about the hotel, a conference to be held with Mr. Barrington, all of which demanded undivided attention, all of them encompassed with difficulty. She turned in despair from the contemplation of her cares. The practical business of selecting clothes for her journey was a welcome distraction. She made a doleful face on realising the limitations of her wardrobe, and saw visions of the bridal equipment she would have considered fitting : for she was by no means indifferent to personal appearance, and in spite of her poverty had succeeded, partly by her good taste and partly by the help of a pretty figure, in earning the distinction of a place among the well-dressed of her sex. Her own little inheritance having been spent in furnishing the hotel, she was almost literally penniless ; and though with real troubles assailing her it might seem incredible that she could give a second thought to such a trifling vexation as a picture of herself in the position of a bride without a trousseau, it is probable that most women would be able to sympathise with her.

Her preparations for packing progressed slowly. She lingered over the contents of old drawers, her books and other treasures, and found the little bedroom which she had occupied since her childhood making an appeal to her to be left undisturbed. The thought that it would be hers no longer, that some one else would occupy it, made her realise for the first time how complete a change the step she was taking would make in her life. The window of the

room, which looked out on the walled garden and the beautiful flower-border she had cultivated in that wilderness, was open. A robin sang underneath it in an apple-tree, and the cheerful voices of the farm-yard and the sound of the talking of rooks in the elm-trees came to her with familiar greetings. Presently she left her work and went out to her garden. It was not the time of flowers, but the sweetness hidden in the heart of winter ventured to disclose itself in that sheltered haven. The crumbling wall was starred with the blooms of yellow jasmine, there were snowdrops in the grass borders, and the air was fragrant with the scent of violets and daphne.

The spot was peculiarly her own, endeared to her by association with the happiest hours of her life, and now, in spite of absorbing troubles, there was room in her heart for a pang of regret at the prospect of leaving the beloved possession for others to tend, or more probably neglect. Memories of summer evenings when Connor had walked up and down that garden path with her returned vividly. She looked back through the years to the day when they had first made a bond of friendship at the boundary fence, and realised as she had never done before the constancy of his devotion and the unselfishness of his love. She had been concerned almost exclusively with the thought of the distress her marriage would cause her father; now it came home to her that a greater pain than his was troubling the heart of her old comrade. And to her father she could still be a daughter—her marriage need make no barrier between them; but with Connor it was different: that friendship which on her part had always trembled on the hither side of love, and would

long ago have leapt the boundary if her heart had not enthroned a hero; that friendship which on his part had done every service that love could inspire without claiming the least of love's privileges, that dear and happy comradeship of the past would be impossible in the future. Her distress was for him, but with it came a very real and almost inexplicable regret on her own account. Connor was, indeed, dearer to her than she knew herself. Michael was her hero, her lover, her strong knight, who had made her his captive and kneeled to her as his queen. Him she admired, almost worshipped. Connor she loved.

The sound of carriage-wheels in the avenue caught her ears and made her heart beat quickly. Michael was not yet due, but he might have come earlier than he had arranged. More probably it was Mr. Barrington. She paused to listen: the carriage stopped at the hall door; it did not afterwards go round to the courtyard as would have happened if Mr. Barrington had been its occupant. Again conjecturing that it was Michael, she went round to the front of the house to end her doubts by a peep at the carriage, and was met in the shrubbery by Carmody, who brought a card in his hand. A troubled look came over Kathleen's eyes as she read the name.

'Did you say I was at home?' she asked.

'I did and I didn't, Miss,' replied Carmody. 'I said you might be in the gyarden, and her ladyship said she had come over from England and she wouldn't be keeping you long.'

The card bore the name of Lady Desmond.

Though Kathleen's generous heart had bidden her write to the unhappy lady with loving sympathy,

though she felt keenly for her in the wrong she believed the world had done her, she shrank now from an interview. At another time she might have felt differently; she might have welcomed the opportunity of speaking words of comfort to an injured sister; but just now, with anxieties almost greater than she could bear besetting her, the prospect of a meeting was wholly distressing. And it also aroused in her a vague and unaccountable feeling of apprehension, a fear of some unknown calamity. She was almost ashamed of her own nervousness as she entered the drawing-room to greet her visitor.

At the first glance there was nothing about Corinna suggestive of suffering or asking for sympathy. The impression flashed on Kathleen was that of her exceeding beauty. She was paler than when she had last seen her, but the change seemed to have added another charm to her face and to have revealed a new loveliness in her dark eyes.

She showed no sign of the agitation which was inwardly consuming her as she took Kathleen's hand, but there was nevertheless something in her manner, some indication that her visit had an unusual significance, that increased the girl's feeling of apprehension.

'Your letter did not reach me till yesterday,' she said. 'I had left the place you addressed it to. I started immediately I received it.'

'You must be tired after your journey. Let me ring for tea at once,' said Kathleen; and Corinna welcomed the suggestion which postponed the immediate necessity of disclosing the reason of her visit.

Since she had come into her rival's presence her

emotions had undergone a change. The tidings of Desmond's engagement had filled her with maddening jealousy, utter misery. She loved him passionately ; her one hope in life was that he would marry her, though her pride, which was as strong as her love, had kept her silent under his neglect. For the girl who had won his affection her feeling had been little short of hatred. She had been impatient to confront her, to tell her the naked truth, and had almost exulted in the thought of the punishment she would inflict by the revelation. That hour had come, but with it an unforeseen influence. Looking into the sweet face of the girl at her side all hatred, all jealousy was forgotten. She thought only of the pain in store for that faithful heart. Kathleen was no longer her rival : she was a sister in distress. Corinna's spirit had always risen against the injustice which the world has condemned women to suffer in their relations with men. She rebelled against it herself, but instead of remaining true to the nobler instincts of her womanhood, instead of confronting the wrong she hated with the strength of her own ideal, she had claimed and exercised an equal liberty with man in his disregard of moral restrictions. In marrying Sir Henry Desmond she had sinned, not against him—him she met on equal terms—but against Nature, against herself. In giving herself a second time to Desmond she had sinned, not against Nature, but against Society. In neither case had she found mercy.

Now she saw in Kathleen another victim of man's infidelity, and the deception of this innocent girl seemed to her even baser than the desertion of herself.

And why had Desmond deserted her ? The answer supplied by the news of his engagement—the

usual one in such cases—that he had seen another woman whose attractions he found greater, had inspired her first feelings of jealousy and hatred for Kathleen. But was this the reason? In the presence of her rival she felt that this was not the reason—she felt that neither Kathleen nor any woman in the world could have won Desmond from her if she had had only a woman to compete with. It was his own career that was her rival. That, she believed, was more to him than the love of any woman, and she had ruined it. She felt that the disaster her love had brought to his fortunes had hardened his heart; that her failure to protest her innocence had embittered him against her; that to marry her would be to admit the truth of the accusation he had denied; that he had turned in anger from the woman who had ruined his prospects to the brave-hearted girl who believed in him, and by marrying him might help to justify the faith of those who hesitated to condemn him. She found some consolation in this conclusion. It was at least more tolerable than the torture of knowing that her lover had been won from her by the fascination of another, for, though the worst side of Desmond's nature was clearly revealed to her, she still loved him with all the strength of her passionate soul.

She shrank from the task before her. It was a cruel thing to tell Kathleen the truth, but it would be more cruel to allow her to marry without knowing it; and for other reasons that alternative was impossible.

Corinna had made a pretence of drinking the tea which had been provided for her. As soon as Carmody had disappeared she left her chair for a place at Kathleen's side on the sofa.

'Your letter touched me very deeply,' she said, 'more than you could guess.'

'I am very thankful. I was almost afraid after I had written that you might think it an intrusion. I did it on an impulse. I longed to let you know how I felt for you in the terrible wrong you have had to suffer.'

'Did Mr. Desmond know you wrote to me?'

'Oh no, no,' Kathleen answered.

'I wish,' said Corinna, 'that I were worthier of the sympathy of your loving heart.'

The vague feeling of apprehension that had troubled Kathleen from the moment of Corinna's arrival grew stronger. There was a hint in her companion's manner of something unexplained, and without a suspicion of the full truth she realised that Michael's relations with her might have been closer than she knew, might perhaps have involved some disloyalty to herself. It was possible even that Corinna might love him. She found no words either to express or conceal her feelings.

'When have you arranged to be married?' Corinna asked abruptly.

Kathleen coloured slightly and hesitated. 'It will be almost at once,' she answered after a moment's reflection.

'At once!' Corinna echoed the words. 'My poor child!' She took Kathleen's hand and looked at her with tear-dimmed eyes. 'Oh, Kathleen,' she said, 'we are sisters in distress. Your trial is hardly less than mine. You cannot marry him. You do not know the truth.'

Kathleen drew her hand from Corinna's. 'You do not understand,' she said proudly. 'I know of the friendship between you and Mr. Desmond. It

may have been indiscreet. It has given rise, as we know, to cruel misinterpretation. He may not have been free from blame; he was not if he let you think there was anything more than friendship in his regard for you. If it was so I do not want to hear about it; it is better forgotten. I wish to be your friend, Lady Desmond.'

Corinna was silent for a few moments: she was deeply agitated.

'Why should I delay to tell you the truth,' she said at last. 'It was to save you from the sorrow and disgrace of the marriage that I have come to see you. All that I have been accused of, all that he has been condemned for is true, true, and I would not have it otherwise. If I have ever been a wife I am his. I *am* his.'

Kathleen grew very pale. She rose mechanically and, feeling giddy, laid a trembling hand on a chair to steady herself. 'It is a lie,' she gasped. 'I cannot bear to be near you. Please go.'

'Yes, I will go,' said Corinna. 'I know how you must hate me. It is part of my punishment. But you—you must not deceive yourself. If you had been already married I might have held my tongue, but as it is not too late, the truest service I can do you is to save you and him from this shame and dishonour. It is not too late. You are unfettered, the future is yours, you may still give yourself to a man worthy of your love. Oh, believe me, I am thinking of you as much as of myself in this, and try and have some pity on me. I have sinned for his sake, and am bearing the punishment. I am condemned and deserted by him, and yet I would not undo my sin. My heart bleeds for you in your trouble, but is not my pain greater than yours?'

'Oh, leave me!' Kathleen cried. 'You are lying, shamefully. You love him and want to divide us by your lie.' She sank back on the sofa overcome.

Corinna stood at her side. 'My poor child,' she said, 'how I feel for you. I will go. You have heard only the truth. I think he will not deny it when you tell him I have seen you. I have something more to tell you, something he does not yet know himself. I am going to be the mother of his child.'

Kathleen gave a low cry; her eyes turned to Corinna with a fascinated stare; then her head fell against her arm on the pillow of the sofa.

Corinna saw that she had fainted. She lifted her head a little and loosened the fastenings of her dress about the throat, but she did not ring the bell for assistance nor make any other attempt to revive her. She stood watching her with the tears running down her cheeks, and a few minutes later, when the girl showed signs of recovering consciousness, she stooped and kissed her and went her way.

Kathleen awoke into a new world: Corinna's words had carried conviction with them; in the realisation of their terrible import a great darkness had descended upon her. The windows were open, the evening sunshine filled the room, the clear singing of a thrush in the garden fell on her ear as she returned to consciousness. Every detail of the scene she had just been through flashed back on her mind. She contemplated it without flinching; no tears came to her relief; her emotions were deadened. Presently she went to her own room and threw herself on her bed in the clutches of a blank despair. A forlorn whisper of hope, 'It may not be true. He may

be able to vindicate himself,' left her unmoved. Corinna's last words rang in her ears.

And it was not so much her own sorrow, her own loss, her eternal division from the man she was on the eve of marrying that desolated her heart so much as her outlook on a darkened world, a world in which love and faith and hope had given place to deception and disgrace and cruelty. She had lost her lover ; she had also lost her hero. With his dishonour her whole faith in life was shaken. In the midst of her meditations a clear question suddenly arose in her mind. Did Connor know the truth? She recalled some words he had spoken on that rainy afternoon when they had last been alone together, something he had said about a woman's nobility in forgiveness which she had hardly understood at the time but which now became significant. He did know. Every one knew except herself. And if Connor were her true friend, how, she asked herself, could he permit her to remain in ignorance? If he were still her lover, how could he tolerate the prospect of her marrying a man of whose infidelity he was cognisant? Because, loving her himself, it would be a mean thing to betray his brother's secret to his own advantage? Even so, it only proved that he respected his own code of honour more than he loved her, and that he could never have really loved her ; but instead of being consoled by this conclusion, as a girl who had rejected a suitor and desired his happiness should have been, she was depressed by it. If she had guessed that Connor's silence was won by Michael's promise to confess the truth to her, she might have turned to him now as the one friend in the world who could help her in her despair ; but not knowing this, resenting his apparent half-heartedness,

his compromise with circumstances, she found herself left to fight her battle alone, compelled to steel her heart in self-dependence at a time when it was most in need of sympathy. Kathleen was the brave-hearted daughter of a fearless race, and now in the supreme trial of her life her courage did not fail. The ordeal before her of meeting Desmond was one in which any girl in her circumstances might have refused to endure; but she did not flinch from facing it.

The daylight was beginning to fail; the thrush no longer sang in the garden. Kathleen had been listening to it unconsciously. The silence, the growing dusk in her room aroused her. She rose and made an effort to think calmly. Her looking-glass showed her some disorder of her attire which she deliberately proceeded to correct. Presently through the open window she heard the hoof-beats of a cantering horse in the distance. She listened with a beating heart as the sound grew nearer. Desmond rode gaily to claim her.

He had not entered the old faded drawing-room since the evening of the dinner-party given long ago in honour of his gallant deed in saving Kathleen's life. A memory of the scene and of the child who had taken possession of him as her hero flashed back on him. And he was her hero still! So let it be. The hour when confession had been possible was gone. The part of the weakling dismayed by the past was not for him; the future was his own. His bride should find in him the true lover of her belief.

The only mitigation of the torture of the interview between them was its brevity. The moment Kathleen appeared Desmond knew that something had gone wrong. He sprang with open arms to

enfold her, but found no response. The warm-hearted comrade ready to meet any ordeal for his sake whom he had parted from a few hours before was unrecognisable in the girl who stood before him. There was something unnatural in her composure and the calm with which she spoke.

'I have seen Lady Desmond,' she said ; 'she has just left me.'

He realised the full import of her words. He stood frozen. His fighting power, which had never failed him in presence of an enemy, refused the encounter with truth. He did not pretend to misunderstand the significance of Kathleen's words, or deceive himself with the hope that Corinna had withheld the truth. He had heard his condemnation.

'You believe her ?' he asked.

'Do you deny it, Michael ?'

He hesitated a moment, but a moment only.

'No,' he answered.

'Oh, Michael !' she cried in a tone that wrung his heart. 'Oh, Michael !' She had held a faint lingering hope that he might have been able to prove his innocence.

He turned away, unnerved, and took a few restless paces in the darkened room before he spoke. He made no attempt to defend himself, or urge the madness of passion, or tell her that his love for her had never failed. And it was of her and her suffering, not of his own humiliation, his own loss, that he was now thinking. He found no words to express his anguish.

'I dared not tell you,' he said. 'I swore to do so, but could not face it. I promised Connor I would tell you.'

'Connor knew ?'

‘He thinks that I have told you and that you have forgiven me,’ said Desmond. ‘I know I have lost your love. I have abandoned even the hope of your forgiveness.’

A glow of colour came to her pale face.

‘I can forgive you, Michael,’ she said. ‘I have forgiven you, and I can still give you a sister’s love if that can help you.’

To most lovers such a promise is the bitterest mockery of consolation ; to Desmond it was sweet. He knew that as a lover he had lost her beyond possibility of redemption, but in the hour of his shipwreck the assurance that the girl whose loyalty he had repaid with deception did not wholly despise him, that she was ready to give him the only love now possible, shed a ray of light on his darkened path. He told her he would strive with what strength was in him to make himself less unworthy of her forgiveness. He spoke with an effort : the most eloquent pleader among his countrymen, he found no words for his own defence.

‘Michael,’ she said, ‘you will not desert her ?’

‘She is nothing to me,’ he answered. ‘I never loved her. She has ruined my life. Do not speak of her.’

‘I must,’ said Kathleen. ‘I know what she is suffering. My burden is nothing to hers. Oh, Michael, if you care anything for the love I now give you, prove it to me by doing your duty to her. No one loves you as she does. She is broken-hearted.’

‘She has ruined my life,’ he repeated. ‘She is dead to me.’

‘Dead to you, Michael !’ she exclaimed, with a sudden flash of scorn in her eyes. ‘The woman

who has forgotten her honour for your sake, sacrificed everything for your love! But you do not know all; she has a further claim on you.'

'She has no claim on me,' he said, his heart hardening against the woman who had betrayed his secret and exposed his perfidy.

Kathleen's spirit was strung to a point which compelled her to speak the words which at another time would have been unutterable.

'Michael,' she said steadily, 'she has the greatest of all claims on you. She loves you, and she is going to be the mother of your child.'

He gave a violent start.

'You will go to her?' Kathleen said. 'Promise me.'

He remained silent. He was stunned by her revelation. It showed him in a new light Corinna's conduct in confessing the truth to Kathleen and making her marriage impossible. He also saw himself as he must appear to Kathleen in the light of Corinna's disclosure, and he touched the lowest depths of self-abasement.

'If this be true,' he said, 'I can thank God that she came to you, and that I have lost you.'

'And you will go to her?' Kathleen urged.

'I cannot tell.'

'It is the only thing I ask of you, Michael.'

He saw himself stripped of every semblance of the heroic in her sight. He saw her ennobled by trial, thinking not of herself but of her fellow-sufferer; and, for him, jealous of such shreds of honour as remained to him, generous in judgment, eager if possible to find in him something worthy of respect.

'Oh, my dearest,' he cried, 'if you can forgive

me, I ask for nothing else from God or man. And you said that you might give me a sister's love! Some day I may show you how much that means to me. The hope of it is a light on my way. You might have left me in utter darkness. Yes, I will go to her. I had better leave you now,' he added, after a moment's silence.

The room was almost dark, he could not see the look of infinite sorrow and compassion in her eyes.

'Good-bye, Michael,' she said. 'May God bless you and help you in your trouble!' She gave him her hand, and he raised it to his lips without speaking and left her.

She stood in the thralldom of a waking dream till the sound of his horse's hoofs on the avenue aroused her. She then went to her own room and flung herself on the bed. The strain was over; the strength which her hour of trial had brought forth failed her now. Her pent-up feelings found relief in a storm of passionate tears.

CHAPTER XXIX

DESMOND ALONE—THE NIGHT

DESMOND rode part of the way down the avenue at a walking pace, absorbed in thought. He then abruptly turned across the park and put spurs to his horse. 'Thank God for my enemies!' he cried. The air was cool and sweet, and a glimmer of daylight, enough to mark his cross-country path homeward, remained. The high bank of the boundary fence faced him, and he rode at it without a check, and on, across the fields beyond, at racing speed, taking every wall and obstruction in his path without turning a yard out of his course. His spirit exulted in a sudden realisation of freedom. He had nothing to conceal, nothing more to lose. The prospect of combat gave him a thrill of joy; the knowledge that he was fighting against desperate odds became a benediction. Those he loved might forgive him, his friends might some day rally round him again, but he did not think of that now. 'Thank God for my enemies!' was the expression of the whole passion of his unconquered spirit.

He rode by the back entrance into the courtyard of the Castle. It was dark and deserted; the sound of his horse's hoofs was echoed from the high walls; the wind woke ghostly whispers among the ruined

outbuildings ; night touched the old place to its ancestral mood.

Desmond unsaddled his horse himself and went round the house to his tower entrance. His nerves were unstrung and his imagination abnormally active. As he ascended to his room a vivid picture returned to him of that night long ago when Mary Rahilly had cursed him, and again he saw her descending the dark stairway while he stood above with a lantern in his hand lighting her departing footsteps. He entered the room ; the fire was burning, its light threw great shadows on the bare walls. There was a muffled sound of wind in the chimney. A feeling of loneliness, almost of apprehension, grew upon him. He drew a chair to the fireside and made an attempt to review his position and arrange his thoughts, but old memories kept rising before him. He saw Corinna in evening attire, a vision of radiance in those grim surroundings, as she had appeared on that fateful evening when she had returned with him to the tower ; and while his pulses quickened at the recollection, his heart hardened against the woman who had ruined him. And she was going to be the mother of his child ! and she had not told him ! She had been too proud to plead with him on that claim. He did not doubt the truth of her statement, and the revelation showed her conduct to him in a new light ; showed him that she could not in these circumstances, even to save him from political ruin, come forward and swear that she was innocent of the accusation that had been brought against her. Some pity he felt for her, but his love was dead. He had promised Kathleen that he would go to her, and this promise he would keep. It might be that he would marry her for the sake of the child, though

to do this would be to condemn himself and injure his prospects still further in the eyes of his countrymen, before whom he had protested his innocence. The difficulties of the conflict he was engaged in were greater than ever : he was encompassed on all sides. He realised his desperate position, and his courage rose to meet it. The culminating outcome of his reflections sprung him to his feet. 'Let them say what they like of me!' the thought flashed. 'Let them have the naked truth! And, by God, with this lie behind me, I will show those who stand in my way that I can hit hard!'

The evening meeting was fixed for eight o'clock, and it was now half-past six. He had made no preparation for his speech, though this was hardly necessary, and he had the half-hour of his drive into Mallow for arranging his thoughts. A faint streak of moonlight on the floor suddenly arrested his attention and aroused him from his meditations. He had not seen the new moon, and, superstitiously careful not to look at it through glass, he left his room without turning to the window and descended the tower steps. A gentle wind was blowing from the south-west, bearing great clouds fringed with light across the dim country. The little river, dark and silent under the Castle walls, caught a flash of the moonlight and rippled into song in the shallows beyond. As Desmond stood contemplating the scene the fall of a footstep close by made him start. He went across the shadow of the tower in the direction from which the sound came, but found no one there, and accused himself of unstrung nerves. He then entered the house, remembering that his mother had specially arranged an earlier dinner-hour than usual that evening on account of the meeting.

Mrs. Desmond was alone by the fireside in the old panelled sitting-room when Desmond entered. She was dressed with her customary care, and in the calm beauty of her stern old face and the simple dignity of her surroundings there was an accord which made the room and its occupant seem essential parts of one picture. A look of unusual tenderness came into Michael's eyes as he greeted his mother. The close bond of sympathy which had always existed between mother and son had never been so strong as now. Others had failed him, or he had failed those others who had been only too ready to trust him, but between these two the bond was unbroken. Connor had stood by him nobly, but he had condemned his conduct. Kathleen had forgiven him, but she was separated from him irretrievably. Corinna might be ready to welcome him to her heart; he had no love to give her in return. His mother remained his one true comrade. It was she who had first inspired his zeal in the service of his country; his triumphs had been her triumphs; and now in his time of danger and difficulty he knew that she was fighting beside him and looking forward to the future without a fear. And he was grateful to her for her reticence. Of Lady Desmond and the divorce case hardly a word had been spoken between them. She had made her own conclusions and asked him for no explanation, though, if she had questioned him, he would have found it difficult, perhaps impossible, to lie to her. Some conversation had taken place between her and her husband on the subject; and the old man, viewing the episode entirely in the light of his inextinguishable hatred of the detested branch of his family, had expressed a hope that the accusation against his son was well

founded. 'Serve me fine gentleman damn well right,' he said. 'A breed of traitors may expect to marry unfaithful wives, and, b' the powers, when 'tis men of the race they robbed do the looting it looks like justice.' Probably the subject would never have been spoken of again between mother and son if it had not been for the events of the afternoon, but these had made silence impossible.

'I have just come back from Ballyvodra,' he said, as he stood at his mother's side. 'I have seen Kathleen again. She is not going to marry me.'

The old lady drew a quick breath, but she gave no exhibition of surprise.

'Lady Desmond has seen her,' he added.

The announcement in its context was tantamount to a confession. He said no more, but remained looking into the fire awaiting his mother's comment.

'I am glad,' she said. 'Kathleen is a good, brave girl, but I am glad.'

'I was unworthy of her,' said Desmond.

'Does it hit you hard?' she asked.

'I have the thought of my enemies to comfort me.'

'Yes,' said the old lady with flashing eyes, 'your country is your true love. Your country needs your love more than ever now when her enemies are trying to make her unfaithful to you. Her enemies are your enemies. You were born to fight this fight and to come through it victorious.'

He gave her a confident smile, and stooped and kissed her brow. 'No,' he said, 'you shall not be ashamed of me.'

The subject seemed to have been closed, and they began talking of the prospects of the Mallow election until, at the announcement of dinner, as they

were leaving the room, Mrs. Desmond suddenly said: 'But that other woman! For God's sake, Michael, promise me that you will not marry her!'

'She has claims on me,' he said.

'Do you love her?'

'No.'

'Then she has no claim on you. To marry her would be your ruin. Give me your promise that you will not even consider the possibility of it.'

The conversation was interrupted by old Mr. Desmond, who shambled into the room in a pair of carpet slippers.

'Come and ate your dinner, man!' said he to Michael. 'You're getting as thin as a ram-pike with all this work. Ate your dinner and leave yourself time for a quiet glass of punch afterwards.'

Half an hour later he started for Mallow in his dog-cart. He had left his man in the town, and he was alone. It was a cloudy night; the young moon had not set, and there was just light enough to define the white roads and show dim openings into wide tracts of lonely country on either side. Desmond allowed his horse to take its own pace. He endeavoured to concentrate his thoughts on his speech, but they kept reverting to the scene of the afternoon with Kathleen, and to what she had told him of Corinna, and to his mother's words in their recent interview.

'Our greatest enemies to-day,' he addressed his audience in fancy, 'are in our own camp; are those Irishmen who, in exchange for the promises of an English party, would give up our ideal of national independence. Will you listen when they bid you sacrifice to the Belly-god? Even if it could be

shown that we should fatten by doing so, which would you choose? To have Ireland become a province of England, forgetful of the wrongs which we have suffered in the past, forgetful of the great hope for which our fathers have fought and suffered imprisonment and exile and persecution and death? or to remain poor, and still keep our birthright of freedom, our pride in our nationality, our faith in the future? If I have personal enemies I can forgive them, for I am a sinner who stands in need of forgiveness myself, but the enemies of my country—the Irishmen who are traitors to Ireland—I cannot forgive.’ His thoughts wandered. ‘*She is going to be the mother of your child.*’ He heard again the words of the girl who had been on the eve of marrying him; her tones vibrated in his memory. ‘*Go to her, Michael; promise me that you will go to her.*’

A picture of Corinna rose before him, not as she had looked when she had first fascinated him with her radiant beauty, not as when she had conquered him by the witchery of her seductions, but pale and weary, condemned by the world, rejected by her lover; and yet proud and silent—too proud to plead with him. And she was going to be the mother of his child.

‘*Promise me that you will not marry that woman!*’ he heard his mother’s words and his own reply, ‘I do not love her.’ And it was true: he did not love her, but he had begun to think of her differently—with pity, almost with tenderness. He had promised Kathleen to go to her, and he would keep his promise. Beyond that interview he did not look.

‘*Your country is your only love!*’—his mother’s words flashed back through his mind and uplifted

him. To that love he had never been untrue. Whatever happened, whether he were victorious or defeated, whether his countrymen accepted or rejected him, nothing could turn him from that great devotion ; nothing could destroy his right to live, or, if need were, to die for his country.

The moon was low in the west, and beneath it the fir-woods of Ballyvodra made a black outline against a space of unclouded sky. A light shone from an upper window in the house, and its faint gleam, the only sign of human life visible, made the loneliness of the surrounding country more marked. Here and there in the sedges of a marshy field, or on the furze-grown banks on the wayside, the wind made a low rustle, and the sharp note of a fox's bark came from a hill covert in the direction of Duhallow ; but these and the rumble of Desmond's cart-wheels were the only sounds that broke the silence of the night. He was slowly climbing the last stage of the long ascent from the cross-roads, and was absorbed in his reflections, when his horse gave a sudden start and stood still. A man had sprung from some bushes on the roadside and stood at the horse's head.

'I'm wantin' a few words with you, Michael Desmond,' he said. 'Tis a nice lonesome place for a private talk.'

'Get out of the way, you infernal blackguard !' cried Desmond, standing up in the cart and giving Costello a cut across the face with his whip. The horse plunged, but Costello did not flinch, and maintained his grip on the reins.

'Faith, you're ready with your names !' he said. 'This morning 'twas "murtherer" you called me before our friends.'

Still holding the reins with one hand, he drew a

revolver from his pocket with the other. Desmond gave him another lash with his whip and almost simultaneously leapt from the cart and sprang towards him. Before he could reach him Costello had fired. Three shots in rapid succession broke the stillness of the night. The horse, half entangled in the reins, was galloping madly up the hill. Desmond lay prostrate on the roadside.

‘Now, me pathriot,’ said Costello, ‘we’re quits—and here’s one more for the cause of ould Ireland.’

He placed the muzzle of the revolver over Desmond’s heart and fired again. Then he dragged the motionless body into the ditch and fled westwards across the country.

The moon set ; the darkness fell over the silent country. The light Desmond had seen in the upper window at Ballyvodra still shone across the valley. Kathleen was in her room thinking of the man who, in spite of dishonour and unfaithfulness, appealed to her heart, weeping, not for herself, but for her sister in distress—the woman whose burden of pain was so much heavier than her own.

And she, that unhappy one, who had sinned and was bearing the fullest penalty of her sin, who would willingly have died to make her own again one hour of the past when Desmond’s heart was hers—she, too, was watching through that fatal hour, thinking in tearless despair of the career she had ruined and the love she could never win back.

And there was one other who loved him even better than these. In the silent house at Duhallow the stern old woman who had inspired his patriotism, the brave-hearted mother who lived in his career, was on her knees praying that strength for the fight might be given to him whose battle was already over.

At the meeting in Mallow that night Desmond's friends waited long for his coming. To other speakers the crowd listened impatiently: there was but one man whose voice could unite them and whose presence could inspire. In other places his enemies were assembled, and denounced him in the name of Ireland. They knew not what they did. Friend and foe, the staunch and the disloyal, were equally bereft. The captain they had loved was lying dead on the roadside, slain by the man whom he had himself snatched from the hand of justice. Throughout the length and the breadth of the land the people were as sheep without a shepherd. A great cause was stricken. Ireland had lost her leader.

CHAPTER XXX

CONCLUSION

MICHAEL DESMOND's story is told. He sinned and bore the penalty of his sin, but he served his country with his whole heart. He failed to achieve the end he had in view, but his failure was not defeat. Such service as his does not perish with the man, it remains a vital influence in the heart of the nation; and to those who come after him, to those more fortunate who may find the way he missed in leading his people to the fulfilment of their nobler aspirations, the memory of his devotion cannot fail to give courage. His story is told, but there are others whose fortunes were connected with his to whom we must bid farewell; and as we wish it to be a happy one, we pass over two years or more, and come to a day in the early summer when the old Duhallow country was gay with the gold of furze bloom, and the shadows of white clouds borne on the south-west wind dappled the green slopes of the hills and darkened the blue of the distant mountains.

The morning sunlight fell softly on the grey walls of the Castle and the crumbling masonry that surrounded the weed-grown courtyard. Rounding the hill slope underneath the tower the little river slipped through deep pools, as blue as the sky they reflected,

into brown shallows, and flashed a thousand ripples to the sun. The wind rustled in the sedges, the sound of the talking of rooks came pleasantly across the fields from the trees that hid Ballyvodra. On the level space of short grass under the Castle walls Connor Desmond was walking to and fro in that meditative mood which comes to us when looking at a familiar scene after a period of absence. After his brother's death he had withdrawn from the active part he had begun to take in public politics. He had no heart to enter into the civil strife which had divided his party and made the cause he loved ridiculous in the sight of its enemies. He did not despair of the future; but for the time he saw no useful way in which he could serve his country, and, glad of the opportunity which his profession offered him, put all his energy and ability into his work, and was rewarded by some emancipation from the tyrannous bondage of unanswered love, and by the definite prospect of a successful career at the Bar. Here at Duhallow, among the old surroundings, a hundred memories of sad and happy days came back to him, and already time and his old habit of facing the facts of life courageously had made it possible for him to meditate on past sorrows and future uncertainties with a tranquil mind.

Those two years had wrought many changes. Michael was gone, and the Nationalist party was without a leader. Corinna was gone. Six months after Desmond's death she died bearing his child. She had had a foreboding of the end, and had begged Connor, who had become to her the staunch friend which he had been to every one who needed his help, to take care of the child in the event of her death. He obeyed her wishes also in laying her at Desmond's

side in the old weed-grown burial-ground at Clogheen ; and there, in the same place where a few months before the whole countryside had assembled to mourn their lost leader, but four people, Corinna's father and mother, Mr. John Severn and Connor Desmond, had stood beside the grave.

The scene came back to Connor now as his eye rested on the little belt of trees that enclosed the place of rest. The hill-slopes about it were again golden with furze bloom, and the larks were singing as on that day when the earth received all that remained of the incomparable beauty which had been the dwelling-place of that warm and wayward spirit. Connor's eyes were dimmed with tears, but a smile brightened them as he turned from the distant picture to another near by. Through the courtyard gate Thady was slowly leading a pony astride of which sat a sturdy fellow of two. Old Mr. Desmond, shaggy and unkempt, was laughing at his side, and Mrs. Desmond watched them with interest as they went down the drive towards the village. She was much aged, her hair had grown quite white, but her dark eyes still retained their old fire. With Michael's death the light had gone out of her life : the presence of the child saved her from apathy. He became her one interest, and, disheartened and stricken with sorrow as she was, her unconquerable spirit dared still to look forward and dream of a day when Michael's son should follow his father's footsteps in the service of his country. That picture, which spoke of the old defeated ambition, the unhappy love, and the young life radiating hope which remained in their stead, touched Connor's heart. The picture of the old man laughing beside the boy who was the child of his own race by the

wife of the hereditary enemy of his family, seemed to Connor to make the last scene in that story of human destiny which had been begun long ago in the act of treachery that had disinherited his people. The memory of old hatred, passed down the chain of lives, had found expression in Michael Desmond's career ; it had mingled with his passion for Corinna. Now those fires were burnt out ; now it seemed to Connor that the occasion had come, in the presence of that young life which had been entrusted to them, to think no more of revenge but rather of forgiveness.

Presently he went out through the courtyard and took the path leading to the Ballyvodra cross-roads. Memories of his brother, and reflection on the careers of others who, like him, had devoted their lives to the service of Ireland, absorbed him. ' They went out to battle and they always fell.' Failure seemed to be their destiny : hope sprung perennially from their defeats. The wrongs that kindled the revolt were still unforgotten : the ideals remained undimmed. They had been rebels one and all. There was not one in all that list of men who had won the confidence of the Irish people who had not been a rebel at heart. And yet it was not the Crown but the Government against which the standard of revolt was raised. Let our people see their King or Queen, and no sign of disloyalty shall mar the greeting. Establish a Royal Residence at Dublin Castle, and there shall be little for the timorous to fear from a Parliament on College Green. Give us a Prince or Princess of Ireland instead of an English official, and we may forget much contempt and neglect. Her Majesty's Opposition fights against the Government of the day : her Majesty's rebels fight for the right of governing themselves under her.

So thought Connor, himself one of those rebels ; and if it be found possible to settle the land question finally, so that patriotic men of the class for which the people still retain their instinctive respect, no longer fearing spoliation, may identify themselves with the national spirit from which they have hidden themselves, and take their proper place in the national councils,—when these men, and those who have led the attack against them may unite in the common cause of their country's welfare,—then the day will have dawned when self-government shall be the voice of the national life. But the hour is not yet : its adventure is a duty left for a new generation. To-day Home Rule spells not Nationalism but Democracy.

Even to Connor, whose faith in the ultimate triumph of his party's aspirations never faltered, the horizon looked dark. While he dreamed of reconciliation he saw disunion. He remembered that civil strife divided his own party ; that the voice of Democracy, which cried for gain, had grown louder than the voice of Patriotism which demands sacrifice ; that those whom the people had been ready to trust, those from whom they had gladly chosen their leaders, had missed the opportunity and held aloof. He remembered that these members of a class which had often forgotten its duty to the nation, loved their country nevertheless, and were ready to fight for their right to hold the lands they had inherited from their fathers. He remembered the difference in creed that divided class from class and north from south ; and, reflecting on all these elements of discord, the hope of those who had read the spirit of Irish nationality looked to him dim and distant. And yet he saw that this spirit survived : that the love of Ireland, the

inspiration which she breathes into her sons, the subtle influence with which she has made even the invading enemy her children, was still the most vital force in the land. And in spite of all past failures he dared to hope of a future when that spirit of nationality should conquer dissension, and prove itself great enough to reconcile the differences of class and party and creed.

The sight of the Ballyvodra carriage turning up the hill towards Mallow at the cross-roads—not the hotel omnibus, but the shabby old waggonette drawn by a pair of horses and driven by David Condon—diverted Connor's thoughts from the contemplation of the future of his country to a theme still nearer to his heart. The hotel had been closed and Kathleen was away from home. After Michael's death she had, for the first time in her life, fallen into a condition of low spirits and indifferent health. She had no heart for the work of managing the hotel, and welcomed a proposal of Mr. Barrington that he should take its responsibilities off her hands while she had a long holiday. She went first to visit friends in England, then to her brother in Western Canada; and it was there, not long before the time fixed for her return, that she received letters from her aunts and her father telling her of the closing of the hotel, and one from Mr. Barrington informing her that he had given himself the pleasure of making her a present of the mortgages on the estate, and had entrusted the documents to the safe-keeping of her lawyers in Dublin.

‘I had intended to give them to Connor,’ he wrote, ‘hoping that they would have found their way to you more happily from his hand than mine; but I am an old fool for trying to arrange other people's happiness, and you are both

young fools in not seeing how to secure your own. And as my little present cannot reach you in the way I wish, you must take it from myself, with the blessings of an old man who has found under your roof the only home he has known since he lost the comrade of his heart.

Connor knew that his uncle had taken up the mortgages, and guessed that it was due to his help that it had been found possible to close the hotel. He had heard nothing of Kathleen for some months. He knew that she was expected home immediately, but he almost dreaded their meeting. Michael's death had brought her no nearer to him. He had no reason to believe that she would transfer her affections once given to a man like his brother, even though she knew that he had been disloyal to her ; nor, if this were conceivable, had he any mind to accept a love which should be coupled with an after-thought of another whom she could have loved better. He preferred her friendship to this—at least he imagined he preferred it in those days when they were apart : it might have been different if she had been near. In writing to her he had found it hard to fall into his old familiar ease of comradeship, and his letters unconsciously took a tone of coldness which she was quick to note and attribute to a change in his feelings towards herself. Her tears falling on one of these loveless pages were eloquent of an altered state of her own feelings. Neither read the other's heart. She could not tell him that, even in the hours of misery which followed her discovery of Michael's infidelity, she had recognised that it was a lost hero, not a lost lover she mourned : he could not know that when Michael died her tears were those of a sister, a comrade who forgives, not those of a woman whose heart is bereft.

At the Ballyvodra cross-roads, where at this time in the morning, when the occupants of the dozen cottages were away at work, the pigs in the muddy beds of the roadside 'loughs,' some tethered goats, and a few bare-legged children usually had the place to themselves, Connor found a little crowd of people assembled opposite the forge watching the erection of a remarkable structure. Two poles had been fixed in the ground, and between them was suspended the old signboard of the Ballyvodra Hotel, which had been lying behind the lodge since its disuse. The new paint on it was hardly dry, and instead of its former inscription it bore the word 'WELCOME' in letters of green on a white background. Branches of laurel and other shrubs were being fastened to the bare poles, and the work as it proceeded was the subject of keen criticism.

'Haven't you a bit of sthring there, Stephen,' said one, 'that you'd be tying up that grand bush wid a sugaun¹?'

'Don't be binding it too tight,' said another. 'Lave the tops droop over.'

'What's this epitaph ye have on the board?' asked Tom Begley, who was one of the party.

'Just "Welcome," Tom,' said the painter apologetically; 'there was no time for more. We only had the notice this morning that her honour was coming to-day.'

'Tisn't much, then,' said Tom, 'but she'll like the look of that word better than them that was there before it. 'Twas a good day that saw that sign down.'

'Oh well, indeed, the hot-tel was grand for thrade,' said one of the bystanders.

¹ A hay rope.

'Phaix it was,' said another; 'four dozen eggs they'd be taking some days, and hins and musheeroons.'

'Not to spake of shillings here and half-crowns there,' said another. 'They do be saying Coneen Cal is a rich man now wid all he gathered from the visitors.'

'Are we come so low that we'd be thinking more of the English half-crowns than of the pride of our ould families?' exclaimed Tom Begley, with indignation. 'Bad luck to them and their money, and more shame to them that curses them behind their backs and flatthers them to their faces. Poor we are, and poor we'll have to be; but we haves our pride, and 'tisin't keeping hot-tels but lading the people we'd wish to see the ould sthock of the country. And if there's oulder sthock than the O'Briens, wher'll ye find it?' he asked.

'Where now?' came the answer from several.

'Tis the best blood in Ireland,' continued Tom, 'and for that matther I'm one o' them meself, though me grandfather took the name o' Begley when he married a fortune and spint it in six months entertaining his old frinds, God rest his soul!' He lifted his eyes as though looking at the inscription above the arch. 'Tisin't much of an epigraph,' he said, 'but, plaze God, I'll have a few words of pothry for her honour.'

'Couldn't we borry the cannon from the great house to fire a salute from?' some one suggested.

'That's a great notion,' said the blacksmith; 'twas good service it done on the day the hot-tel was closed.'

'What was that, then?' asked one who had not been present on that memorable occasion.

'Oh,' said Hickey, 'twas the way one of the visitors refused to go, saying he'd taken the rooms for a month, and the month wasn't up till the next day, and the young gentlemen they just loaded the old cannon wid his hair-brushes and his shiny shoes and his nightshirt, and all the tings he left unpacked, and blew 'em away out of the cannon.'

'Wisha, did they now? Glory be to God!' exclaimed the other. 'They're great lads.'

'And let ye all remember,' said Tom Begley solemnly, 'if anny of ye hear a word spoken agin' the O'Briens, let ye remember that a lady of the family, and she the best young lady in the counthry, stood at Michael Desmond's side on the platform in Cork when them that should have been his frinds deserted him. But,' he added, 'it is no time to be spakin' of our thrubbles—give me a sup of whisky, Stephen Hickey—I know you have it in the cupboard widin'—for the insphiration is upon me, and 'twasn't on pump wather, nor tay, nor coffee-tay, nor cocoa-tay, me Muse was raired—no, but on nate necthar from Mount Parnashius, honest woman, and you wouldn't have me disgraced by making bad pothry to welcome Miss Kathleen. Listen now,' he said, after the drink had been provided, 'here's part of it annyhow :—

We're Bradys, Gradys, Murphys, Quins,
We're Twomys and O'Haras ;
We're Loughlins, Coughlans, Fagans, Flynnns,
And Burkes and Macnamaras.
We're Shaughnessys of high degree,
And Begleys bowld as lions ;
But when we welcome thee, Machree,
We're all of us O'Briens.

That's part, and there's betther coming ; and lest

anny one should say in afther-years that the po-ut Begley suffered neglect in his own gination, let one of ye pass me hat round, for God knows 'tis bad times wid me.'

'That's well you brought in all thim names, Tom,' said one of the group with admiration; 'but there's more you left out. Couldn't you give us another verse now?'

'There's more, but I'll be keeping them till her honour comes,' said Tom.

'Tis good practice for you to be repating them, Tom,' suggested another. 'They'll rise aisier to you when the time comes, and you can send your hat round agin.'

'Well, well,' replied Tom, who like most poets required little encouragement to repeat his own verses, 'maybe there's truth in what you say. Give me another sup o' whisky. There's names here,' he added, after refreshing himself, 'that on'y the scholars in me congregation will remimber.

And some of us were ne'er at school,
Some poor and blind, the same as
Great Homer, Job, and King O'Toole,
Meself, and Polyphamus.
But when once more your smile we see
And hear your voice's kindness,
The poor lay down their load, Machree,
The dark ¹ forget their blindness.

We're Nolans, Dolans, and O'Sheas ;
We're Linnahens and Carthys ;
We're Dalys, Healys, Condons, Creaghs,
And Crones and Moriartys.
We're Blakes and Roches proud and free,
We're Kearneys and O'Connors ;
But when we welcome thee, Machree,
The name we love's your Honour's.'

¹ Blind.

Connor Desmond had joined the group as Tom Begley was repeating the last verse, and out of courtesy to him the people withheld the applause which they were ready to accord until they heard his comment.

'Those are the best verses you ever made, Tom,' said he, 'and that's saying a good deal. But I have one fault to find. Why didn't you put in the Desmonds?'

'Oh then, Masther Connor,' replied Tom, 'I'd put in anny other name in Ireland and say the name of O'Brien stood above it this day—anny other name but Desmond. But 'tishn't so soon we'll forget one that's gone, and while Ireland's Ireland, there's no name that will stand above his.'

The golden morning passed into a noon of cloudless skies. Waves of the south-west wind rolled over the uncut meadows, and the warm air was sweet with the smell of white-thorn and furze blossom. It was a day of days for the meeting of happy lovers, and for Connor and Kathleen it needed but a word on either side to make its benediction all their own. Each feared the meeting. With the news of her coming the philosophic mood in which he had schooled himself to look on the future deserted him; and to her, as she drew near home, the joy which filled her heart was troubled by the doubt lest the welcome she desired most should be that of a comrade who was no longer a lover.

There was a holiday that afternoon for every one at Ballyvodra, and the whole population of the district had assembled at the cross-roads some hours before Kathleen arrived. Coneen Callaghan, who had

ridden from Mallow on a bicycle, dashed into the crowd at half-past three with the news that she was on the way, and shortly afterwards Kathleen drove up and stopped to receive the greetings of her humble friends and to hear Tom Begley's congratulatory poem under the triumphal arch. The welcome she received would have touched a heart less warm than hers.

At the hall door of Ballyvodra all the members of the family, with the addition of Mr. Barrington, were assembled; and there was much embracing and laughing, and a hundred questions asked and left half answered before the threshold was crossed. Kathleen's improved looks were noticed at once, and she in turn saw with delight the renewed vigour of her father's bearing, and could honestly congratulate her aunts on their youthful appearance. 'My dear,' said Mr. Barrington, 'I suppose I have no business here; but I cannot help feeling like one of the family, and this is the greatest pleasure I have had for many a day.' She gave the old man a kiss in return for his words and deeds of affection, and went into the house holding her father's hand.

To find every trace of the hotel vanished and the house exactly as she had known it from her childhood made Kathleen's return a real home-coming. She ran from room to room and found everything arranged as it used to be. From the kitchen, where Mrs. Irwin, the cook, held her in a motherly embrace, she flew to her garden, and went on to visit the stables, the farmyard, the haggard, and every familiar and beloved corner of the old place. All the work-people were back from the Cross, for there were some duties to be performed before the dancing—with refreshments provided by Mr. Barrington—

which was to celebrate the conclusion of the happy day. It was milking-time, and a dozen girls bearing pails on their 'kerchiefed heads approached her in single file on their way to the dairy, and stood smiling, each with a hand raised to steady her burden, as Kathleen stopped to speak to them. Old Tom Condon, the shepherd, just in from the hill-pastures, met her with a delight only less evident than that of his dogs. Ned Murphy, the ploughman, whose speech was always difficult to understand, let a stemless pipe drop from his toothless gums when he saw her, and became wholly inarticulate in greeting. Before she had completed her round she had stopped to shake hands with half a dozen fathers of long families and send kind messages to wives and children. From all her humble friends she received a welcome which gladdened her heart, and tributes of admiration which, even when their extravagance made her smile, she knew to be sincere.

One thing only troubled the happiness of her home-coming, and that was the doubt as to what manner of reception she would receive from Connor Desmond. The friendship she had once pleaded for she now feared. She had grown to love him. She believed that she had always loved him, and she may have been right, and the change which revealed the truth no more than a stage of growth like that from the bud to the unfolding flower. But whether she were right or wrong, whether the love had always been there awaiting its hour of expression, or whether the new light in which Connor had been shown to her when he stood loyally by the side of the brother who had become his rival and forgot his own happiness in his endeavour to secure hers, had touched her imagination and wrought the change in her feelings,

—whatever influence had been at work, the transition was complete ; and, with a warmth as sweet as that of the first days of summer when the spring-time has been cold, the love of the woman blossomed out of the friendship of the girl. A joy which made all others seem worthless without it had come into her heart with the knowledge of her secret, but with it also came the fear that is born of love. What if Connor had changed ? What if he had grown content to accept the relationship she had striven to establish ? She could not banish the fear, and yet an after-thought whispered to her that it was groundless, that a word of love from her would be all that was needed to break down his reserve. But for this instinctive promise of her heart, her eyes would not have shone with happiness as she saw the old scenes around her ; there would have been no eager visits to familiar haunts nor merry greetings with kind friends. Connor was in her thoughts the whole time ; she knew that he was at home ; she knew that, after all that had taken place, he would not approach her again as a lover : the signal must come from her, and she determined to make it. The impetus of the high spirits which her homecoming had excited gave her courage. She ran to her room and wrote a note which she sent over to Duhallow Castle by hand.

‘DEAR CONNOR,’ she said, ‘I have just come home. I will be at the boundary fence about half-past eight.

KATHLEEN.’

She became very thoughtful and sedate after she had made this impetuous move.

After the closing of the hotel Mr. Barrington had

taken a small house in Mallow. He would gladly have remained at Ballyvodra, but a sense of delicacy told him that while he was there Mr. O'Brien might be constantly reminded of his obligation to him, and hardly feel that he had again become master in his own house. He still cherished his twofold hope of making Connor his heir and seeing him married to Kathleen; but, whatever happened, he was determined to endow her with a large share of his wealth; and so keenly had he identified himself with the fortunes of the family that he had decided to make his permanent home in the neighbourhood.

During Kathleen's absence the household at Ballyvodra had dropped back into habits of negligence and disregard of appearances. Dogs were again to be seen at the breakfast-table while Mr. O'Brien, oblivious, read little books of devotion. The boys refused to dress for dinner at night, and Miss Bridget and Miss Honora gave up all attempts to maintain decorous observances. 'We can only wait for Kathleen's return,' they repeated to each other; and they were justified in their expectation by the change which marked the very day of her arrival. Dinner that evening, it was understood, was to be a very different thing from the ordinary meal. Mrs. Irwin had done her part in the kitchen, and a glance at the table, decorated with flowers and the best silver and glass, showed that the importance of the occasion was appreciated. There was also an unexpected addition to the family party, for Major and Mrs. Spencer Boyle, near neighbours who, on hearing of Kathleen's arrival, had walked over to Ballyvodra, had been pressed by Mr. O'Brien to return to dinner. Miss Bridget and Miss Honora were in a flutter of excitement. It was long since

the sisters had ventured to appear in their evening dresses with the little timid openings at the neck which pleaded pathetically for their lost youth, but to-night they felt sure that their rashness would bring no satirical comment from their brother. It seemed to be known in the house that they were making unusual preparations, for when Mr. Barrington, who wished to take them into his confidence about a little present he had for Kathleen, inquired of Conceen Callaghan if they were in the house—and this as early as half-past six—Conceen showed signs of unusual information. ‘They are, sir,’ he replied, adding with something which looked almost like a wink, ‘and what’s more, they’re above stairs now, sthrippin’ for dinner.’

Kathleen herself had not been unmindful of her appearance. She entered the drawing-room at the hour of assembling dressed in white and looking delightfully fresh and attractive. Major Boyle made her a pretty speech, and his good wife was generous in flattery. ‘Spincer always said you’d turn out the prettiest girl in the county, my dear,’ she said, ‘and Spincer’s no bad judge. Don’t y’ agree with me, Mr. O’Brien?’

‘Indeed,’ said Mr. O’Brien gallantly, ‘he has a wife to prove it.’

‘Ah now, don’t be foolish!’ she replied. ‘’Twas of Kitty I was speaking.’ She appealed to the youngest son of the house who had just come into the room. ‘Now isn’t that a sister to be proud of, Dan?’

‘Oh, she isn’t too bad,’ Dan admitted with reluctant admiration; ‘but ’tis a pity some of her bachelors are not here to admire her instead of just ourselves. I’ll engage, though, they’ll be round the

place as thick as thistles in a day or two. There's Horace Croker and Jemmy Broke and Connor Desmond and——'

'Hold your tongue, sir, and remember your manners,' cried his father, 'or 'tis in your own room you'll eat your dinner.' But his anger was over in a moment, and Dan relieved his feelings by continuing the list of Kathleen's admirers *sotto voce*.

For years there had not been so happy a gathering at Ballyvodra as that which met round the dinner-table this evening. The relief from his money anxieties and from the humiliation he had felt while his house was a hotel had made Mr. O'Brien ten years younger, and his pleasure in having Kathleen back again gave him the spirits of a boy. Mr. Barrington, conscious of his own part in promoting the happiness he saw around him, sat down to dinner with a content which was crowned by the knowledge that two bottles of Mr. O'Brien's '47 port had been decanted. Kathleen set them all talking at once by the questions she asked about the doings of their neighbours during her absence, for every one had a bit of gossip to impart or some story to tell in good-natured ridicule of this one or that, and every member of her own family had a different version of the facts, and was anxious that Kathleen should accept his particular account. She looked round her and saw the old room, the kind faces, and her father's contented smile, and heard her brothers' voices in familiar dispute, and her aunts' deprecating tones, with feelings that trembled between laughter and tears. The windows opposite to her were open and showed glimpses of the country flooded with evening light. Above the dark green fir-trees at the edge of the park the white clouds were taking wild-rose hues; a distant peak of the

Galtees flushed in the sunset, and against the purple distance a golden tract of furze was lighted with all the splendour of the west. The smell of garden and field, the sound of lowing cattle, and the talking of rooks came in at the open window. Kathleen's fancies were roaming; she hardly heard the talk which was going on around her. She was thinking of the appointment she had made, eager to be away, and yet half afraid of her adventure. She was beginning to wonder, too, how she could contrive to slip out unseen by the others, or leave her father's guests. Mrs. Boyle's laughter recalled her attention to her immediate surroundings.

'Oh, Mr. O'Brien,' she was saying, 'you were a great lad!'

'Tis the story of the five Miss Dalys he's telling her,' whispered Jack to the Major. 'You'd think there wasn't a girl in the county hadn't been in love with him.'

'Five as fine gerrls as you'd wish to see'—Mr. O'Brien continued his narration. 'A general's daughters. The eldest twenty-five, the youngest seventeen, and I about twenty-one at the time. And there were the two boats full of us, three young officers and myself and those five splendid gerrls, when we stuck in the sand. There we were and no getting to land; and, believe you me! I carried every one of those women ashore on me own back. Would they trust themselves to the young officers? No, ma'am! All of them I took. I won the day.'

Every one was listening and laughing. 'And what made it the more difficult was that they all wore crinolines, I believe, sir,' observed Jack.

'They did not, sir!' replied his father. 'Twas before the time of crinolines. Don't I remember how

they clung to me?' It was long since he had told the story : it was an indication of his happiest mood, to be followed by a feeling of self-reproach for having allowed worldly memories of his youth to occupy his mind too fondly. Nothing could have given him so much satisfaction on the evening of Kathleen's return as to have gathered his household together and read prayers from the well-worn volume of family devotions ; but a glance at his sons, and the absence of any sign of the need of spiritual communion in the countenances of his guests, compelled him to abandon the idea.

Towards the end of dinner Mr. Barrington made the announcement that Duhallow Court was in the market. There had been some rumours of it afloat, but the definite news aroused great interest.

'Well, I don't wonder at Sir Henry Desmond wanting to be rid of it,' observed Major Boyle. 'His associations with the place cannot be very pleasant.'

'And what good has he been to it, or to the country?' exclaimed Mr. O'Brien. 'One of your absentees who lives among us for a couple of weeks in twenty years, and then joins in the attack on the Irish landlords over in the English parliament. They're all alike, these politicians, English and Irish ; there's no trusting 'em—they neither fear the Lord, nor——'

'Nor remember the landlord,' said Jack in an undertone.

'Nor honour the Queen,' continued his father.

'They truckle to the voters,' said the Major, 'to the greedy tenants on this side of the water and the greedy shopkeepers on the other.'

'You have it, sir,' said Mr. O'Brien ; 'you have it to a T. They're Mountain Pharisees, White-washed Walls! We put our faith in England, and

what is our reward? We'd have been as well off if we'd been rebels.'

'The fact is,' said Mr. Barrington, 'that the Irish gentry put their faith in England when the English government was aristocratic. Now it's bourgeois.'

'We ought to have trusted our own people and led them,' said Kathleen. 'I only hope it is not now too late to do so. If we trust them, I believe they will stand by us loyally.'

'What! Trust the fellows who openly admit they want to rob you?' cried the Major. 'You're half a rebel yourself, Miss Kathleen.'

She knew the hopelessness of expecting him or her father to change their point of view, and she hardly wondered at it when she remembered that they were accustomed to hear their class subjected to daily abuse and misrepresentation in the newspapers of the Nationalist party. If the reconciliation she dreamed of were to come it would be the work of a new generation.

She changed the subject which always saddened her. 'Wouldn't the Court suit *you*, Mr. Barrington?' she asked.

'If I had a wife, my dear,' he replied, 'I should not hesitate.'

'Ah, Mr. Barrington, what'd be easier than to get you one?' said Mrs. Boyle. 'Put yourself in my hands.'

Miss Bridget and Miss Honora exchanged quick glances.

'And if I can be of any assistance to you,' put in the Major, 'a life-long experience of the sex and their weaknesses in many countries——'

'Spincer!' exclaimed his spouse.

'Is at your service,' continued the Major, who

was engaged in mixing a glass of punch. 'You and I are true to the national drink anyhow,' he said to his host. 'I've no doubt that that port is the best, and Barrington won't be quarrelling with us for leaving him to deal with the bottle without our help.'

Mr. Barrington had filled his glass, and was examining its crystal gules against the evening sky. 'Yes,' he said, 'I'm really thinking about the Court, and perhaps Jack might help me to look after the land. We'll talk it over, Jack. And now,' he added, turning to his host and standing up, 'I see the ladies are getting ready to leave us, and before they go I want to propose a toast; and if in giving it there is one member of the family I have more in mind than the others, it is not because I do not think with the most affectionate feelings of them all, but because she—if an old man may be permitted to speak plainly—because we have been parted from her, and because she happens to be the most lovable and charming young lady in Ireland. Mr. O'Brien, *Your re-united family.*'

He filled Mrs. Boyle's glass with the port he loved, and the Major stood up with his tumbler of steaming punch in his hand and added a word of congratulation. It was a pleasant ending to a merry meeting, and there were happy tears in Kathleen's eyes as she listened to the little faltering speech of acknowledgment which told how deeply her father's heart was touched.

It was already past the hour at which Kathleen had promised to meet Connor when she went to the drawing-room with her aunts and Mrs. Boyle. Five minutes later she had escaped, hardly knowing what

excuse she had made for leaving, and careless, when once she had got away, as to what they thought of her absence. She ran to her room for a cloak and cautiously descended the stairs, fearful lest she might be intercepted ; but there was no one in the hall, and she slipped out through the garden door unseen. In the shrubbery walks near the house it was already dusk, but an afterglow of light remained on the open country, and down in the west the mountain horizons stood out clear against a sky still warm with the memory of the sunset. Kathleen's heart beat quickly as she crossed the park towards the boundary fence. Now that the meeting she had so often pictured was imminent, she had no word of greeting prepared, no conception as to how she would act when she saw Connor ; and one moment vague fears beset her and checked her footsteps, and the next an impetus of love, a thrill of expectation, hurried her onward.

Connor was waiting at the spot where they had first made friends in their childhood. He was on his own side of the bank, but directly he saw her he sprang across it, and, playing the part to which he had steeled himself, called a ' Welcome home, Kathleen ! ' with the cheerful tone of well-feigned comradeship.

It looked after all as if they were going to meet in the old friendly way ; but when they drew near, when they were only parted by a step or two, they stood suddenly motionless, each seeking the other's eyes ; and then a signal, the oldest in the world, the immemorial signal from maid to man, flashed between them, and the next moment she was held close in his arms.

There was no thought of explanation, no fear of misunderstanding. She had always known his secret :

he now knew hers. It needs years of devotion to prove the strength of a man's love for a woman ; a true-hearted girl can give him all the assurance he needs in the surrender of a kiss.

The country had grown very quiet. The lowing of cattle, the bark of shepherds' dogs were no longer heard, and the talkative rooks had settled for the night. Through the silence came intermittently the squeak of fiddle-strings that told of festivities at the cross-roads, and clear in the distance rose the wandering song of the little river as it found the shallows beyond the Castle. The last bar of rose light had faded in the west ; across the park, through the great dark trees, the lamps shone cheerfully from the windows of Ballyvodra ; the mystery of the twilight filled the land ; and eastward towards the mountains the first stars shone above the lonely hillside where Desmond had been laid to rest.

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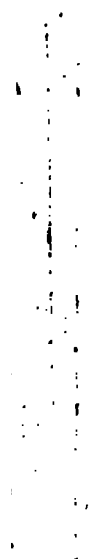
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